

## Green Glass Door

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# Green Glass Door

by [bonespell](#)

## Summary

They seem to realise what they're doing at the exact same moment. Tubbo yanks his hands away, like he's been burned. Tommy flinches away in turn.

"You're supposed to be dead," Tubbo repeats.

Tommy, unable to help himself, dryly replies: "Yeah, I'm starting to gather that."

Tubbo reels back and punches him, hard, right in the eye.

*So, some things could go through the green glass door. Grass, but not flowers. A happy person, but not a sad one.*

or: tommy is tired enough *before* his dead best friend breaks into his home.

## Notes

hello folks! we are doin the thing, for some reason unbeknownst to me. these things just sort of possess me against my will, and this was always coming, given that i've been a marvel fan, both tv and comic, since i could walk, probably. i honestly don't ever remember getting introduced to it, it's just always been there, so take that as you will lmao my point is its been a longass time

i have zero idea how frequent these updates will be because i'm literally in the middle of exam season. like i took one earlier today. dead middle. wish me luck folks im gonna need it.

anyways, here are some very existential spiders. in advance, i'm not sorry.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

## i love you so

Lately, Tommy just can't seem to get to sleep.

Of course, that means what it always has - Tommy isn't one to idle. Before he even realises what he's doing, he's thrown himself from his bedroom window, shot a web to the building across the street, and taken off.

He's zeroed in on the city surrounding him before he even begins the arc of his first swing. Sometimes, he thinks his bedroom window and the suit are a portal to an alternate dimension, one where Spider-Man is all Tommy is expected to be - Not a *good son* or a *good student* or a *good friend*. Every night, he leaves his civilian self in his room, and slips into the only skin that's felt right in a long, long time.

When he's Spider-Man, all he does is help people, whether it be beating up muggers or offering to carry an old woman's groceries or coaxing a kitten down from a tree in Central Park or even one of his ridiculously-costumed super-foes. When he's Spider-Man, he's appreciated, *needed*, and so many worlds away from his too-empty apartment and desolate social life that he can almost... forget.

It's exhilarating, to know you're needed, wanted, even when you feel utterly alone. Tommy doesn't remember that feeling, but Spider-Man? Spider-Man receives it in *abundance*.

The swinging motion is second nature. Tommy's only been at this since he was fourteen, sitting at seventeen now, but it feels like something that's been there all his life, something he's always had. Maybe it was something he was always destined to be.

Every night, he gets drunk off this feeling. He catches up on sleep in morning classes he doesn't care for, hides his quickly-healing injuries with too-big sweatshirts, slumps down in his seat with his earbuds hidden in the bunching fabric. He doesn't care that it's unhealthy - Not that anyone knows what's unhealthy for him, anyways, not even him. Tommy's always heard the saying *If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life*, and he finds he's the best example of its truth.

You could say that Tommy liked his job- Well, okay. *Job* implies he's getting paid. For the record, he's not.

Tommy lands lightly on top of a flat roof, high above the city, some distance from his apartment. He crouches down, poised and ready to spring off at any moment, and tunes into the sounds of his city.

There, he thinks, snapping his head sharply to the left, enhanced ears locking onto the crackle of a police radio, the squeal of tires, distant yelling. He can't quite make out any words, but his money is on *car thief* or *speeding ticket*, or maybe something more exciting if New York City is feeling like it (Tommy finds it usually is). Well, he figures, if he was getting paid, this would mean he was *clocked in*.

With inhuman grace, Tommy throws himself from the ledge with a loud *whoop!* and swings down to face it head-on.

Tommy's gotta be honest - He's really tired of these weird, incorporeal, otherworldly villains coming in and messing with *his* city.

It's definitely past his usual turn-in time, but the little itching in the back of his mind wouldn't allow him to call it a night, and eventually, grumbling in frustration, he succumbed. He really should get better at saying no to his *own head*, but somehow, he doesn't think that's going to happen anytime soon.

It had led him to the basement of an old, condemned building on the edge of Brooklyn, close enough to the water for Tommy to smell the salt and garbage. Good ol' New York. He'd carefully climbed in a window, testing each step, slowly lowering through the floors as the tingling had become nearly unbearable.

Lo and behold, he'd thought, there was a creepy basement, because there was *always* a creepy basement. Somewhere, something was dripping. Every other step was into odd sludge - Tommy didn't even want to *know* what it was made of. Old, rusted technology of some kind was backed against a ledge that dipped into a *really* foreboding chasm. Tommy takes a step towards it, and his spidey-sense goes off like a bomb.

It's only sharply-honed reflexes that gets him out of the way in time. As he launches himself into the air, a dark blur rockets right through where he was standing, like a shitty *Sonic* animation, taking up post in front of the machine Tommy isn't sure is dry enough to work. One look at the guy, and Tommy has had *enough*.

"You look," Tommy points slowly, other three limbs sticking to the jagged roof in a position that would make a circus contortionist cry, "Like a dollar-store *Star Wars* cosplayer. Big man, my Halloween costume from when I was ten was a better look than *that*."

The certified caped creep of the week doesn't respond, instead opting for a loud, tinny exhale through his comic-book supervillain mask. Tommy sort of wants to laugh, even if it's not the time. Can he fight *one* normal-looking evil bitch?

"So," Tommy tries again, haltingly. "You gonna... stand there all night? Cause, I gotta admit, man, it's past my bedtime, and I'd really like to get home."

The masked man (Wow, that makes him *no* cooler, Tommy thinks) doesn't respond again, not even with a huff, standing defensively in front of the machine, like a mother and her young child. Tommy's words click in his head a moment later.

"Not that I have a bedtime," Tommy backtracks, immediately, stumbling over his words in a way that makes *him* no cooler. "I'm an adult, you know, with a job and *taxes* and definitely impose my own-"

The man launches himself at Tommy, pointed fingers - claws? - outstretched. Tommy slams himself into the floor, rolling through Mysterious Sludge as the man crashes into the roof where he just was, sending down dust and pebbles.

“Hey, pal,” Tommy suggests, inching towards the machine. He doesn’t know what he plans to do when he gets there, but he does his best work under pressure. “Maybe we don’t, uh, slam into dilapidated buildings, lest they *come down upon us*, yeah?”

The man realises what he’s doing, seeming unphased by his harsh collision with the cruel stone. He launches at Tommy again. This time, Tommy has no leverage - He extends his arms, hoping his (hopefully) superior strength will stop the man in his tracks.

He gasps, feeling like his heart has been ripped out of his chest, horribly cold, as the man phases right through him, like an- an illusion, or some kind of *ghost*. Tommy’s seen a lot of bullshit in the last few years, but ghosts are a child’s tale, something Tubbo would have teased him to high hell for mentioning even in passing-

Right. No time to wallow, he corrects. He’s fighting a steampunk-cosplaying hologram motherfucker. Now’s not the time to pay his respects to the dead, dubious or definite.

Tommy doesn’t let up, throwing himself into the harsh concrete again and again, trying to land a single hit on the guy who seems to have no trouble knocking *him* around, failing over and over. He doesn’t know how long he’s been down here. The steady dripping is driving him insane.

Tommy just needs to think. It’s gotta be some weird tech, something he sees plenty of, and he’s just gotta find the source, and he can end this so quickly the masked marauder won’t even know what’s happening.

The guy’s *frigid* hand closes around Tommy’s throat, lifting him clean off the ground. Tommy immediately starts fighting, kicking, employing full use of his super-strength to try to worm free, but the guy’s grip is iron. He presses a button, two, three on that rusted machine, and Tommy starts seeing spots.

Finally, the pressure lifts - Tommy's weightless, until he makes contact with the side of the chasm, weirdly cylindrical, and rolls down into the center.

"Ugh," Tommy grits. "Dude, why? You know I can climb the wall, right? What was the goal there?"

The man doesn't answer. Tommy manages to push himself up onto his elbows, but can't get onto his hands. He accepts the fact that he's gonna lie here until he can. The man keeps pressing buttons like he doesn't have a care in the world, which Tommy resents *greatly* - Being ignored, that is.

Something begins whirring, spinning, moving the air so quickly it almost simulates a real wind. Tommy doesn't have time to think about it, despite his spider-sense blaring in his head like a campus fire alarm. He can't move, there's no time. He curls into a ball, covers his head, knows it won't do anything, and then his world crumbles away in blinding white.

Every part of Tommy's body feels like it's on fire, every molecule, every pore. He feels like he's being ripped apart, like something has reached into his ribs and *yanked*, and then as soon as it's started, it's over, and somehow he's alive.

Everything hurts. The whirring noise is only louder, ringing in Tommy's brain, debilitating. He feels like he's been spit-roasted over a bonfire. The man looks down at him.

"Who-" Tommy coughs, voice breaking, vision blurry, world spinning. All of his senses are out of whack. He's vulnerable. "Who *are* you?"

Predictably, the man doesn't answer. Tommy can feel himself bleeding somewhere - Probably from multiple spots. After another few moments of staring, the man turns, takes a few steps, and dissipates into the air, like he was never there at all.

"Ugh," Tommy says, to nobody in particular, as his senses finally short out completely. "I hate cosplayers."

When Tommy comes to, he knows in his gut that he's late for school.

His very first disconnected instinct is to ask Phil to call him in, before he realises that's not an option anymore, hasn't been for a while. His next instinct is to close his eyes and go back to sleep, before he remembers he's in a ditch in Brooklyn, and he'd very much like to not be.

He still feels like one well-cooked spider, but Tommy manages to push himself to his feet, not without a hell of an effort. His spider-sense is going off without end, but it's happened before when Tommy's taken a really good hit, and this feels like a really good hit. Sunlight pierces through the holes in the ceiling, and Tommy wants to punch it in the face.

Tommy manages to force himself up the side of the cavern, dragging himself to the machine. It's got blood on it, probably his - The weirdo from the night before had thrown him into it bodily a few times. Tommy winces when he turns, feeling the dried blood tug at his skin.

After a few moments of staring at it, he makes a decision.

"Better safe than sorry," Tommy mutters to nobody in particular, putting his foot through it.



It's a satisfying crunch, probably as much retribution as Tommy's going to get for all his hard work earlier. He *really* thinks he should get home, maybe sleep off whatever severe head injury he definitely has, and then *maybe* email his teachers to catch up. He accepts that he probably won't end up doing that.

He takes the sewer tunnels - He's in no state to be spotted in public. The smell is absolutely nauseating, especially for Tommy's too-good nose. His spider-sense is still going off, but he dutifully ignores it, except for the few times he checks around, finding absolutely nothing for his troubles. It's definitely the head trauma, then.

When he finally surfaces, some way away from his place, he decides to swing the long way home, just in case he's actually being followed, a paranoia that's eating at him despite his confident conclusion.

In the daylight, he swears he can see dark flashes out of the corners of his eyes. Then again, one of the eyes of his suit is cracked, and his own eyes are still aching from the weird beam he'd been hit by. He finds nothing at all, no matter how many times he does a circle to check, or flips around mid-swing to try to catch *anything* at all.

He's being really stupid. Tommy decides *fuck this*, and climbs into his open window, determined to take a very long shower and then sleep for two straight days.

His spider-sense nearly knocks him over with how loud it goes off, like a nuclear fucking bomb. He spins around, entirely on instinct, and meets eyes with-

What the fuck.

In a dark suit, black and green and much more technologically advanced than his own, in the windowsill of Tommy's room, crouches another Spider-Man. He seems to be absorbed with the tablet on his arm, tapping away. Tommy stares at him, incredulous behind the mask, until the other Spider-Man looks up.

They both raise an arm, point at each other shakily. The other Spider-Man's mask eyes narrow, crouch becoming defensive. Tommy plants his feet, ready to launch. They stare at

eachother for a moment more, big bug-eyed suit to big bug-eyed suit, and then-

The other Spider-Man slams into Tommy, full force, which hurts *so* much more with the current injuries he sustains. Tommy curls, managing to turn what would have been a very hard landing into a very slightly softer roll. They tumble back, grappling at eachother aimlessly, and Tommy's almost inclined to laugh until the other Spider-Man's elbow slams into the hardwood floor, and it leaves a deep dent.

Right, Tommy reminds himself, super-strength. Maybe he should take this seriously. God, his neighbors are going to hate him.

Tommy shoots a web into the corner, and flies at the intruder like a bullet, catching him in the chest with his heels, slamming him into the wall hard enough that the shelf above him rattles, and then collapses. Tommy watches in slow-motion as the only photo he cares about, the last one he has, crashes to the ground, frame splitting.

Tommy sees red when the other Spider-Man steps on the photo like he doesn't even notice.

They're back to grappling again, and this time, it's real, violent, angry, with intent to harm on both ends. Tommy feels a gloved hand slip under his mask seam, and he reels back, punching the other Spider-Man right where he thinks his nose must be, grinning when he hears a snap.

The other Spider-Man lurches back. "Dude, what the fuck was that for?"

Instinctively, Tommy starts responding, snapping, "You broke into my house, bi-"

He can't breathe. This isn't- no. This isn't happening. Ghosts aren't real, and Tommy had held his cooling corpse, had felt his broken back, had-

“What?” The other Spider-Man mocks. “What were you gonna call me? C’mon, don’t be a-”

“Tubbo?” Tommy finally manages to choke out. No, no, no. He’d closed Tubbo’s unseeing eyes himself, more carefully than he’d done anything else his entire life. This has to be a trick.

The other Spider-Man, with Tubbo’s voice, bristles. “How the fuck do you know my name?”

Tommy can’t find the words. He finds the seam of his mask, grips, and yanks it off in one swift movement. He knows what he must look like, wild, crazed, beat to hell, but he doesn’t care, doesn’t-

“No,” The other Spider-Man says, vehemently. “Bullshit.”

“Take off your mask,” Tommy demands, sounding broken. “Take it off.”

“You’re dead,” Tubbo’s cold eyes stare back at him as his mask retracts, like movie tech, too good to be true. “You’re fucking dead.”

“So are you,” Tommy informs him, hollow.

Tubbo is upon him before he can blink, trembling hands now gloveless, scarred, stout fingers brushing over his face, his throat, his shoulders, chest, pushing through his hair, eyes unfocused, like he’s looking for something. Tommy takes the opportunity to skate his hand lightly along Tubbo’s spine, feeling his vertebrae, looking for the break he *knows*-

They seem to realise what they’re doing at the exact same moment. Tubbo yanks his hands away, like he’s been burned. Tommy flinches away in turn.

“You’re supposed to be dead,” Tubbo repeats.

Tommy, unable to help himself, dryly replies: “Yeah, I’m starting to gather that.”

Tubbo reels back and punches him, hard, right in the eye.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Tommy holds one hand up, other pressing a bag of frozen peas to his black eye. “Run that by me one more time? You’re from another-”

“To be entirely honest, I’m not sure,” Tubbo confesses, wiping at the dried blood crusted across his upper lip with a wet paper towel, a sandwich baggie of ice taped to the bridge of his nose with masking tape.

He looks exhausted, Tommy thinks. He can’t remember his Tubbo ever looking so tired, so worn down. This is better than his last image of his Tubbo, he supposes, the broken body he’d cradled like a newborn babe for hours in the biting cold.

“How does that even happen?” Tommy tilts his head. “Like, how did you end up *here*?”

“Don’t give me those,” Tubbo groans, waving his hand noncommittally, “puppy dog eyes. Come on, man. Why can apparently every version of you do that so well? Look, I don’t *know* how I ended up here. I was doing my thing-”

“Your spidery thing,” Tommy interjects, helpfully.

“My spidery thing,” Tubbo corrects himself unconsciously, realises what he said in the next moment, and gives Tommy a glare. Tommy snorts. “And next thing I know, I’m right in front of a wormhole, and I can’t move fast enough, and then I woke up to find you in that ditch.”

“It was not a ditch,” Tommy finds himself insisting.

“It *so* was a ditch,” Tubbo reaffirms, and Tommy flips him off. “After that, I followed you home, and-”

“You punched me in the eye,” Tommy finishes.

“And I don’t regret it,” Tubbo tells him, matter-of-factly. Tommy pulls an ugly face at him. Tubbo sticks his tongue out back. After a moment, they move on, and it’s awkward, ugly, stilted, and Tommy hates every moment of it, but what do you even act like when an alternate version of your dead best friend-

“How do we get you home?” Tommy asks, and hopes it’s not too demanding, doesn’t reveal how much he wants this to end.

“My running theory *would* be that we go use the machine again, but somebody,” Tubbo glares at him, “stomped on it.”

Tommy throws his hands up. “What was I meant to do? An evil *Star Wars* character decided to hit me with the laser *probably meant for Australia* and you expect me *not* to break it?”

“I expect nothing from you at any time,” Tubbo informs him, and it almost feels like old banter - The kind between Tommy and *his* Tubbo, so many ages ago.

“Well, I expect some ideas from *you*, Mr. Mechanical Suit,” Tommy fires back. “Where’d you even get that thing?”

“Built it,” Tubbo shrugs. “You think I have any money at any given time?”

“Probably not,” Tommy concedes. “You always were a DIY sort of guy. That doesn’t surprise me.”

Suddenly, the pause is almost unbearably awkward. Tommy feels like he’s drowning in it.

“Okay,” Tubbo stands up suddenly, turning around, hands up. “For minimal amounts of weird, let’s pretend we don’t know any other versions of eachother, yeah? We’re strangers.”

Tommy nods, halting. He *knows* they’re strangers, but he’d give anything to have this again.

“Hey, don’t look all sad,” Tubbo frowns. “I was doing it too. Let’s just - shake on it?”

“Yeah, alright,” Tommy reaches out a gloved hand to shake Tubbo’s, watching as the mask covers his face once more. It’s *so* cool. “Back to Brooklyn, then, to see if we can figure out what the fuck is going on?”

Tubbo’s shoulders sag. “That basement smelled *horrible*.”

Tommy pats one shoulder consolingly, pulling on his mask with the other hand. “Yeah, it does. Let’s go.”

Tommy launches himself from the window again, trusting Tubbo will follow. He hears a telltale *thwip* , and can’t stop the smile that comes to his face.



# three dead guys walk into a bar

## Chapter Summary

“Not so fast,” Tommy cuts in, ignoring the weird feeling about all of this in his gut. “We have a few conditions.”

“We do?” Tubbo asks.

“We do,” Tommy reaffirms, giving Tubbo a long stare through the mask.

“Every second this feels more and more like a kidnapping,” The other Spider-Man says.

## Chapter Notes

this story is gonna take forever between parts this is my fair and reasonable warning bc summer vacation is coming and i'm terrible at doing things during the summer

anyways here's more bench spiders. enjoy them

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If Tommy is going to be thankful for anything about all of this, he thinks the thing he's thankful for is that this version of Tubbo banters with anyone who'll listen, in the same way he does. He's glad it's a cross-universe Spider-Man thing, because sitting in the rafter of this place, shoulder to shoulder with an alternate-universe version of his dead best friend would be unbearable otherwise.

“You've got to be fucking kidding me,” Tubbo murmurs, breaking the awkward silence, knocking his shoulder against Tommy's. “Look to your three.”

Tommy follows the directions, and he drops his head into his gloved hands when he sees what Tubbo is looking at.

“Why is there another Spider-Man?” Tubbo gestures widely, still whispering, but a little more violent, and to nobody in particular. “I can barely deal with the one I just got.”



“I am a delight,” Tommy objects. “Plus, *you* broke into *my* house, not the other way around, so I don’t want to hear it. I didn’t give *you* a black eye after following you home, did I?”

“You know that thing is probably almost gone,” Tubbo dismisses, “If your healing factor is anything like mine, which I assume it is, based on how you got fried last night and you’re good to go now. What is he doing?”

The other Spider-Man, dressed in entirely black and white, split down the middle. His costume has a *hood*, which honestly, Tommy thinks is just inconvenient and a little pretentious. He’s fiddling with the broken machine, seemingly thoughtful.

“We should probably stop him from doing it,” Tommy admits.

“Wow, boss man, I never would have considered that,” Tubbo draws. “You take the left, I’ll take the right?”

“Why do you get the right?” Tommy asks. “That’s my better swinging angle.”

“Mine too.”

“Okay, how about you distract, and I drop down on him?”

“That means I’ll probably be the only one getting punched,” Tubbo deadpans. Tommy exhales through his nose in frustration.

“Okay, fine. How about-”

“Where’d he go?” Tubbo suddenly interjects, and they both get about half a second’s notice from their spider-senses to leap out of the way as the third Spider-Man comes out of thin air with a violent swing.

“New plan!” Tubbo shouts as he catapults himself out of the rafters, to more open ground. “There is no plan! Kick his ass!”

“That’s the first thing we’ve agreed upon since meeting eachother!” Tommy fires back, hanging from the rafters, waiting for the third Spider-Man to resurface. What kind of powers are these? Invisibility? Superspeed?

Tommy watches the Spider-Man appear out of thin air, and swing at Tubbo, who flips out of the way, over the punch. The Spider-Man disappears, leaving a few purple particles behind that Tommy doubts he’d be able to see without his enhanced vision.

“He teleports,” Tubbo informs him, yelling from across the room, as if he could hear Tommy’s mental turmoil. “Pin him down! Don’t let him go!”

“Easier said than fuckin’ done,” Tommy mutters, aiming for the particles he sees beginning to form. The Spider-Man materializes right in between Tommy and Tubbo, and Tommy doesn’t waste a second before he slingshots himself at the guy.

The Spider-Man seems to have been anticipating this. He vanishes, and Tommy slams into Tubbo, full speed. They skid a few yards, head over heels, scratching against the rough floor.

“Watch where you’re fucking going!” Tubbo snaps, pushing Tommy off him the moment they stop moving. Besides a few dirt marks, he seems unharmed.

“Get out of my way next time!” Tommy bites back. “I didn’t fucking *try* to get you-”

“Not the time!” Tubbo suddenly decides, and Tommy is awashed in anger. “Did you see the particles?”

“Yeah,” Tommy confirms.

“Get in his face when those appear. I think I can get him from there.”

“Got it,” Tommy is already swinging, tossing his body through the air, lithe and beautiful and deadly in a way he wouldn’t believe was real from watching shaky videos of himself alone. He tries not to inflate his ego, but something he forgets how *inhuman*-

Not the time, Tommy chides himself as the first particles appear. He’s calculating even when he moves, angling his swing, all but flying towards the offending airspace. Right as the Spider-Man materializes, Tommy’s feet connect *hard* with his chest, and they both slam into the concrete.

“Move!” Tubbo shouts, and Tommy rolls as his sense blares. The other Spider-Man makes an attempt to follow, but seems to be too disoriented to do so. In the next moment, he’s tangled in a dark net that no amount of squirming seems to undo. Tommy whistles lowly.

“The hell is that made of?” Tommy asks when Tubbo comes up besides him, arms crossed.

“Unimportant,” Tubbo shrugs. “Hey, tall, dark, and magic. Mind telling us what you’re doing with our evil machine?”

“We claim evil machines now?” The other Spider-Man asks, tone suggesting an eyebrow raise.

“You don’t?” Tommy finds himself chiming in, noticing the way the other Spider-Man stiffens, just barely, the moment Tommy speaks.

“Well, usually, this isn’t an issue,” The other Spider-Man drawls, “Because I work alone.”

“Yeah, we all do, that’s been established,” Tubbo waves a hand. “What’s the deal with your... teleporting? Is that a bite thing or...”

Tommy sees Tubbo’s fist clenched by his side. Something is up.

“Guess so,” The other Spider-Man shrugs. “Always been able to do it. Mind letting me out?”

“Not so fast,” Tommy cuts in, ignoring the weird feeling about all of this in his gut. “We have a few conditions.”

“We do?” Tubbo asks.

“We *do*,” Tommy reaffirms, giving Tubbo a long stare through the mask.

“Every second this feels more and more like a kidnapping,” The other Spider-Man says.

“Condition one, you come back with us to home base, so we can work on getting you home,” Tommy lists, “because I don’t know if you noticed, but this is *my* dimension, and presumably not yours.”

“I’ve noticed,” The other Spider-Man tilts his head, tone dry.

“And two, unmask,” Tommy finishes, ignoring him. “Right here, right now. We will too.”

“No thank you.”

“Do you want to get home or not?” Tubbo deadpans. “Swear.”

“I swear,” The other Spider-Man says, and Tommy crouches down, holding out a pinky right by his hand.

“Now for real,” Tommy says, and the other Spider-Man is silent for a long while.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” He finally manages, and Tommy shakes his head rapidly.

“Not at all, big man! This shit is legally binding,” Tommy finds himself insisting. As he says it, he can hear Wilbur’s voice in the back of his mind saying it right along with him.

The other Spider-Man gives a long-suffering sigh when he realises Tommy really *is* serious, which Tommy thinks is unfair, given that they’ve known each other for all of thirty minutes. Still, he hooks his pinky finger with Tommy’s, and just like that, the net is gone, reduced to atoms.

“Here goes nothing,” Tommy hears Tubbo mutter, before he pulls off his mask. “I’m Tubbo. You can call me Tubbo.”

Tommy waits for the other Spider-Man to make a move. When he doesn’t, Tommy pulls off his own mask. “Tommy.”

The other Spider-Man freezes. Tubbo and Tommy exchange a look before his hand, inexplicably shaky, comes up to pull off his own mask.

He’s not exactly what Tommy was expecting. The other Spider-Man has an angular jaw, gray eyes, full eyebrows, fluffy hair, and a jagged scar cutting through the center of his face. He was expecting someone... tougher? Edgier? Tommy admits, if the suit is split half-and-half because of the scar and not vice versa, it *is* a little bit funny.

“Ranboo,” The other Spider-Man - Ranboo - says finally, hand coming up to rub the back of his neck, almost sheepishly. “My name is Ranboo.”

“ *Ranboo* ?” Tommy echoes. “Is that your real name?”

“His name is *Tubbo*!” Ranboo cries, indignant.

“Not my real name,” Tubbo says, rather smug, but Tommy can see he’s gone just a little too pale. “ *Ranboo*. ”

“I have nothing to say to this harassment,” Ranboo declares. Tommy snorts.

“This teamup is either the universe’s worst idea or its best plan,” He declares. He doesn’t miss the way Ranboo’s head snaps towards him as he speaks, or the way Tubbo is trembling as he looks at Ranboo, or the ugly pit he can feel forming in his own gut that represents a feeling he can’t quite identify.

“I’ll drink to that,” Tubbo agrees. “Disregard the fact that I am underage and that is illegal.”

“I’m pretty sure our entire superhero thing is illegal,” Tommy shrugs, electing to ignore it all. “What’s one more felony offense?”

It's all going so well, despite a few bumps, that Tommy almost forgets the universe constantly has it out for him, one hundred percent of the time and change. As Tubbo climbs in the living room windowsill, the air around him begins to distort.

It's like nothing Tommy's ever seen before. Tubbo seems to almost *lag* , visage moving in a way that shouldn't be humanly possible. A low hum fills the air, scratching at Tommy's brain in the worst ways. It lasts only a moment, but it feels like hours, until Tubbo pitches forward silently.

Tommy darts to him, catches him before he hits the ground. He pulls off Tubbo's mask, revealing clouded eyes that clear after a moment. Tommy can see the fear in them.

"What the fuck?" Tubbo is the first one to ask. "What just-"

"I've never seen anything like that," Ranboo chimes in, weak, and Tommy knows it's going to happen a second before he does. Ranboo's image distorts, and Tommy lays Tubbo down, sliding across the room to scoop up Ranboo, too, before he makes contact with the hardwood floor.

"You two are a couple of fainting damsels," Tommy grunts, pretending to struggle as he stands with Ranboo in his arms, despite Ranboo being as light as a feather to his super strength. He lays him on the couch, placing Tubbo next to him. "Did you just fucking *glitch*?"

"I guess so," Tubbo says, bemused. "That *hurt* like a *bitch* . Hold on, give me an hour, I'm going to have my suit run a biometric scan and see if there's anything up."

"You're gonna run a *what* with your *huh* ?" Tommy stares.

"I upgraded a little past spandex pajamas," Tubbo snorts. "Don't worry about it. Here, watch this."

Tommy watches, mouth agape, as four robotic... long spikes unfold from behind Tubbo. As Tubbo waves, two of the arm-things wave with him. Ranboo is staring, too, but Tommy doesn't like his expression.

"You do whatever you have to do," Tommy decides. "I'm going to find you both a change of clothing, and then we are going to have a *conversation*."

"Oh, joy," Tubbo says, sarcastic. "My favourite."

Now that the field banter has dissipated, Tommy is deeply uncomfortable in his current company.

He's curled up on an armchair Phil used to like, feet tucked under his legs, swamped in a worn hoodie that he thinks belonged to Techno, once upon a time. He feels utterly alone, like he's snuggled up to ghosts, cold and unyielding. It doesn't happen that a ghost is across the room from him, using some impossible technology to create numbers Tommy can't hope to understand.

"Huh," Tubbo says, somewhat to himself. Tommy looks up to see his eyes wide with surprise that's too familiar and yet so new, different, unknown, that it *hurts* to see. "That's... hm."

"What's wrong with us?" Ranboo looks up from whatever he'd been fidgeting with.



“That’s the thing, boss man,” Tubbo replies, seeming a little lost. “I- Maybe my suit got messed up in the jump, or maybe something else happened, but I gotta say, it’s never done this before. Cross my heart.”

“What did it do?” Tommy chimes in, a little scared to know what’s making typically-blunt Tubbo dance around the subject like that. “What’s wrong?”

“What it didn’t do,” Tubbo corrects, “is come back with anything at all. It has no idea what’s wrong with me, just that something is. I don’t even have... symptoms. What the fuck?”

“And it doesn’t... usually... not do things?” Ranboo says, slow, seemingly unable to find the right words. Tommy sort of agrees. He doesn’t really know what to say - this technology is completely foreign to him, too.

“We’ll go with that,” Tubbo snorts. “I... honestly have no idea. What can we even do? What if that happens again?”

“It felt like a bad time to say before,” Ranboo’s voice is almost meek, and Tommy raises his eyebrows at him slowly, “But I, um, may or may not have stolen some information from the machine before you attacked me? Just- just what I could salvage, so nothing great, but-”

“Give it to us, boob boy,” Tommy deadpans.

“Boob boy?” Ranboo sputters. “ *Boob boy* ?”

“You heard the man, boob boy,” Tubbo grins, crooked and mischievous. “Hand over the goods.”

“I want to go home right this instant,” Ranboo mutters. “Has anyone ever told you two that you’re, like, evil twins? Like the cats from that one movie-”

“We met eachother about an hour before we met you, boss man,” Tubbo says, and it sounds like a reminder. Tommy feels his heart squeeze, squeeze, squeeze. “What movie are you even talking about?”

“The one with the dogs, right?” Tommy forces out, and he supposes it shows in his tone, because Ranboo gives him a strange look. “And the animation?”

“Descriptive,” Tubbo mocks, but it’s light. This whole interaction is too unbearably familiar. Tommy needs space. He needs to leave. He can’t.

“Back on topic,” Ranboo interrupts, and it’s a wonderful reprieve. Tommy inhales too quickly, trying to catch a breath. “Tommy, do you have a computer with a USB port?”

“Tell me it’s not a flash drive,” Tommy hears himself groan. He’s still a little distant, but he’s coming back to. “Tell me it’s not.”

“Uh,” Ranboo says, eloquently.

“What the hell is a flash drive?” Tubbo questions.

“Oh my god, you’re old,” Tommy drops his head into his hands dramatically. As off as it feels, the easy banter almost makes everything bearable, everything better. He wants this whole situation to be over. The universe, Tommy decides, has a bad habit of throwing his nightmares he didn’t even *know* were nightmares back into his face.

“Just get the laptop,” Ranboo sighs, long and tired. “I deserve financial compensation for every second I spend with you.”

Tommy barks a laugh as he goes to hunt down the requested computer.

“You called me old,” Ranboo murmurs, “This thing is ancient.”

“Shut up,” Tommy whispers back. “Don’t talk. Don’t breathe. If we all remain very, *very* still, it’ll probably load.

The three of them are pressed together on the couch, in a way that vaguely makes Tommy’s skin itch, but is the most convenient way for them all to see the small, battered screen in his lap. Nobody dares to breathe as the laptop’s fan works overtime. Finally, *finally*, there’s a pop-up on the screen.

It’s guarded by a password. Luckily, Tommy isn’t so worried about that, especially as Tubbo steals the laptop out of his lap and starts typing.

“I thought you didn’t know what a laptop was,” Ranboo teases, light.

“I don’t know what a *flash drive* is,” Tubbo corrects, pulling panels up on the screen that Tommy doesn’t really understand. “This piece of shit, however, is a really rudimentary version of my tech at home.”

“Do you live in a *Hunger Games* -esque dystopian future, or something?” Tommy asks, only half-kidding.

“Something like that,” Tubbo shrugs, but before Tommy can question it, he places the laptop back into Tommy’s lap, password lock broken, text loading. “Disregarding the fact that I don’t know what a *Hunger Games* is.”

Tommy scrolls through the small, compact text, searching for anything that sticks out. There’s large, bold text at the bottom.

*WARNING*, it reads, and Tommy’s breath catches, *OUTER-DIMENSIONAL SUBJECTS MAY BE REJECTED BY THIS DIMENSION. THESE SUBJECTS EXPERIENCE RAPID CELL AND BODY DECAY THAT MAY RESULT IN DEATH.*

“Oh,” Tubbo states, like it should be obvious. “We’re dying. Alright.”

Tommy feels like his body is rejecting his insides, like he’s about to start hacking up a kidney or his liver or... something. Tubbo says it in a way that’s so clinical, so *straightforward*, like it’s not absolutely earth-shattering, and-

“Tommy?” Ranboo’s voice is gentle, as is his hand on Tommy’s shoulder. “You good, man?”

Without entirely meaning to, Tommy bats Ranboo’s hand away. His face contorts into hurt for only a second, but a long enough second for Tommy to feel guilt about it, just a little.

“I’m fine,” Tommy lies through his teeth. He can tell the other two know, but they’re not questioning him, and for that, he’s grateful. “You’re- what?”

“Rapid cellular decay, may result in death,” Tubbo shrugs. “I have to assume that whatever that weird glitch shit was is part of it, or maybe why, and that- that Ranboo is in the same boat as me.”

“Why?” Tommy forces out. Ranboo shoots him another concerned look.

“Doesn’t say,” Tubbo admits, soft. “I know as much as you do, unfortunately. Can I use your shower?”

“Anything you need,” Tommy waves his hand, aiming for nonchalant, but it comes out far more raw than he intends. The air in the room only gets more uncomfortable when the words leave his mouth. “It’s- down the hall, to your right.”

“Thanks,” Tubbo murmurs, standing awkwardly. “I’ll just... do that.”

“Yeah,” Tommy echoes as Tubbo leaves. Ranboo stares at them, curled up in his corner of the couch, and doesn’t say a word.

*Phil texted me, said the school called,* Tommy reads, mouth set into a heavy line, *Unexcused absence. What happened?*

*tell him to ask me himself, if he cares so much,* Tommy sends back. Techno’s typing bubble pops up once, twice, and then disappears. Right above this, his last message from Techno is a month and a half ago. As all of their perpetually-brief conversations go, Techno had left him on read.

*You know he’s busy,* Techno finally responds. Tommy, from where he’s seated on his bed, scoffs to open air.

*not too busy to send you after me. Tommy can't help himself.*

*You know he has trouble talking to you. You don't make it easy for him.*

*why should i? Tommy is starting to feel hot anger burning through his stomach, just like he always does when Phil comes up. he's the one who left his fucked up kid with anger issues all alone in the big apple. that's the issue here, right? that i'm too fuckin mean?*

*I didn't say that, Techno sends back, immediately, and Tommy can almost feel the exasperation in his tone. Phil didn't send me after you, Tommy. I asked because I was concerned.*

*were you now? Tommy's fingers are trembling with rage. That's all it is. Rage. concerned enough to come back?*

*Tommy, you know I can't. I'm so close to finishing my degree.*

*and you won't come home then, either.*

*I never said that. Techno repeats, like a broken record.*

*then you're coming back after school? Tommy hopes Techno can feel the contempt oozing from the message. A minute passes, two.*

Techno has left him on read again. All of a sudden, Tommy feels his eyes burning. He squeezes them shut, lets a few tears slip through, willing it to stop before someone hears him. He doesn't cry about Techno or Phil anymore. He doesn't. He hasn't done that since he was young.

He's been alone for so, so long.

Tommy curls up in the center of his bed, lying on his side, tucking his legs into his chest, his chin into his knees. He must make a picture, a near-adult hugging himself like a child after a nightmare.

He feels like a child, but his nightmare doesn't end. He so desperately wants to be whole again.

He forces himself out of bed, eventually, and pads softly to the living room, peeking around the corner. Ranboo and Tubbo are curled up, poking at something on Tubbo's weird screen.

Tommy feels ugly jealousy twist inside him at the sight. He thinks it was easier being alone.

Late that night, in awkward silence, spread out all over the room, Tommy has a revelation.

"Suit up," He says, shutting his laptop, watching Tubbo and Ranboo's heads shoot up in unison. "C'mon, move, let's go!"

"What is it?" Ranboo says, rushed, groping for his mask in the couch cushions. "What's wrong?"

“I’ve realised something,” Tommy says. “You know- Well, no, you wouldn’t. The guy who used the machine and brought you here, he’s intangible, like a ghost, even though ghosts aren’t fuckin’ real. He turned the machine on while I was in range on purpose. He lasered me on purpose.”

“He used you as a trial run,” Tubbo murmurs, almost to himself. Louder, he says: “That’s rude as hell.”

“Isn’t it?” Tommy rolls his eyes, pulling on his mask, hopping into a crouch on his windowsill. “Not on my watch, I say. I’m not letting a Hollywood villain use me in his evil teen movie plot.”

“So what’s the plan?” Tubbo tilts his head as the mask melts into place out of nowhere. Tommy will never get over how *cool* that is.

“Well, gents,” Tommy gives his best grin, despite the fact that they can’t see it, gesturing widely, still crouched on the open windowsill. “Do they have *Ghostbusters* where you’re from?”

## Chapter End Notes

comment and feed me. everyone who commented on my last chapter has my undying love and gratitude

see y'all eventually!!



# incongruous

## Chapter Summary

Tubbo is fast, but Tommy is faster. Maybe his spider was better when it bit him. Maybe it's the trauma. Either way, Tommy reaches Ranboo first, heart pounding in his ears, reaching out desperately as they both are pulled down, down, down.

Casper gets away.

## Chapter Notes

sorry that this was actually the slowest update ever. three weeks for 4k words is sorta pathetic lmao, but i'm almost done finals, and everything's in order for next school year, so at the very least, i should be more available for now. i haven't done anything but schoolwork in weeks so. Freedom Is Confusing What Do I Do With Myself Now

luckily the crimeboys exile lore stream yesterday changed me as a person and i am now all in on my meyt content again so no promises but also fingers crossed knock on wood that this'll be updated more often

also - name change! you'll see an emerging theme here, plus this name is simply better, so avenoir -> green glass door :))))))

xoxo your best bitch (parasocial) kayla

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They find the guy overlooking Times Square.

“Hey, Casper,” Tommy calls, watching him whip around at Tommy’s voice. “Can I call you Casper? Like Casper the friendly ghost. It’d be easiest, I think, even if you’re not very friendly. I guess, though, if I only know one ghost, you’re automatically the friendliest, right?”

Predictably, Casper doesn’t respond. Tommy doesn’t know what he was expecting. He rolls his shoulders in preparation. On one side, Tubbo cracks his knuckles. On his other, Ranboo rolls his head, as if to stretch his neck.

“Before we start, I gotta ask, are you even a real New Yorker? Times Square? Really? No self-respecting bastard in this city would be caught *dead* here.” Tommy continues, unperturbed by Casper’s silence.

“Speaking of being *caught dead*,” Tubbo butts in, “What’s your deal, boss man? We all know ghosts aren’t real, so what are you? C’mon, use your words, dude, we’re all friends here.”

Casper must huff, because out of the slits in his mask crawls fog, as if he’s breathing into winter air. It isn’t cold, not even chilly - Tommy files that information away for later. He’s not sure what he’ll use it for, but that inquiry is also for later.

They stare at each other for a long moment, in what must be the world’s most uncomfortable-to-watch staring contests, with the dead eyes of masks on both sides, and then Casper turns tail and flees.

“Shit!” Tommy exclaims, shooting a web line across the street as a knee-jerk reaction. The other two aren’t far behind, maybe half a second tops, and as a trio, they rocket after him.

Tommy has to admit, Casper is giving his all. He’s swerving and diving and flipping and doing anything he can think to get away from the three of them, but they’re hot on his tail. Tommy feels a distant, fuzzy feeling of pride, and then Casper starts to pull ahead, one step at a time.

“Ranboo,” Tubbo says, sudden and clipped by the effort he’s exerting to catch up. “Can you teleport ahead of him? Try to corner him between you and us?”

“I don’t know if that’s gonna-” Tommy begins, but Ranboo cuts him off.

“On it,” Ranboo responds, and then he’s gone, leaving only particles behind. Tommy matches Tubbo’s swing as they wait for him to reappear in a second.

“I don’t know- This is a bad idea,” Tommy pants through the mask, which is... unpleasant, mouth-breathing in what is essentially his spandex plastic bag. “Casper - The dude - He’s, he’s intangible, remember-”

Before Tubbo can respond, or Tommy can even finish, Ranboo reappears, right in front of Casper. He freezes in place when Casper phases right through him, seemingly stunned. Tommy keeps chase, but Tubbo dives down to grab Ranboo, snagging him by the back of his suit until he can fix his swing. When they come up beside him, Tommy shakes his head lightly.

“Told you so,” He mutters, two parts concerned and one part smug. He doesn’t even feel guilty about it. Tommy feels frustration bubbling in his chest.

“Shut up,” Tubbo snaps. Ranboo very nearly flinches at the tone. There’s a story there, Tommy thinks. Now’s not the time to ask.

“Any other genius plans?” Tommy bites back instead, and Tubbo lets out a frustrated growl.

“You’re insufferable,” He seethes, and Tommy can’t help but make a mocking noise in return.

“Knock it off,” Ranboo interrupts. “C’mon, he’s getting away! Tubbo, what about your weird net you used on me? The one that stopped me from teleporting?”

“It worked?” Tubbo asks, delighted, energy changing at the drop of a hat. Tommy puts on an extra burst of speed to keep up with Casper, who’s putting more ground between them by the second, as he pointedly ignores how hearing Tubbo’s tone changing the moment he speaks to someone else *aches*.

“Quickly, boys!” Tommy urges through gritted teeth.

“Give it to me,” Ranboo demands. “I’ll teleport in front of him and throw it. Hopefully, it’ll displace whatever tech he’s using to phase like that.”

“Don’t fumble it this time,” Tommy snaps, and maybe it comes out meaner than intended. It definitely does. He’ll apologise later, he thinks.

“Roger,” Tubbo nods, ignoring Tommy’s admittedly rude remark. “Red, stay with me.”

“Red?” Tommy asks as Ranboo vanishes with the net.

“Y’know, like Red Rover,” Tubbo says, and Tommy can hear the mirth in his voice. “You’re annoying, just like it! Plus, not like I can use your civilian name in your own world.”

Tommy refuses to admit that Tubbo has a point about his name. He decides to focus on the annoying part.

“I am not annoying!” He squawks, faux-offended. “I am a delight!”

“You keep saying that,” Tubbo drawls amusedly, “but I’ve failed to find any benefits of you since we met.”

“Since you attacked me,” Tommy sniffs.

“I-” Tubbo begins, but he doesn’t get to finish as Ranboo appears far ahead, in front of Casper, and tosses the net. Tommy finds himself unconsciously holding his breath, waiting, willing for this absolutely bullshit plan to work-

For a moment, it does. Casper is stopped, wrenched back against the force. Tommy is about to whoop with joy when Casper phases back out, through Ranboo again, this time with

malevolent force. Tommy's spider-sense blares like a train's horn.

Ranboo takes one, two, three staggering steps back, clutching his chest, and he tumbles backwards, off the roof he's on, plummeting towards New York City's busiest streets, forty stories below.

Tubbo is fast, but Tommy is faster. Maybe his spider was better when it bit him. Maybe it's the trauma. Either way, Tommy reaches Ranboo first, heart pounding in his ears, reaching out desperately as they both are pulled down, down, down.

Casper gets away.

The silence is suffocating as they re-enter Tommy's apartment. He gently places Ranboo on the ground, sliding his despondent teammate off of his back, holding onto his wrist for a moment to make sure he doesn't lose his footing. Nobody says anything. The dull anger in Tommy's core is heating up, aching for use.

Tubbo is on Ranboo in an instant, taking his wrist and elbow, helping him to slump on a couch. He pulls off Ranboo's mask, whose eyes are far away, and sits next to him, murmuring something that even Tommy's enhanced hearing can't pick up. Tommy wonders who's going to snap first.

Tommy, almost unconsciously, turns on the small, dusty TV. The news is on, and-

Ugh. Normally, JMM and his slander don't bother Tommy in the slightest, but the situation is already so tense, so fragile, and when the words *THREE SPIDER-MENACES?* cross his screen, the first thing Tommy feels is a sour sort of gratefulness.

*At least, Tommy thinks, JMM always remembers the hyphen.*

The second thing he feels is something inside him break. Turns out it was him who would snap first. He wishes he could say he was surprised.

"You know," He says, and nearly flinches at the venom in it himself, "If you hadn't-"

Tubbo stands up, too fast. Tommy offhandedly wonders if he set off Tubbo's spider-sense. He feels equal parts sick and satisfied, at that.

"Don't," Tubbo snarls, eyes so, so angry, "you fucking *dare* talk about him like that."

"Oh, okay," Tommy gestures, wide and sarcastic, like he's on a stage. "So when it's me, we've *just met, don't know eachother*; but when it's *him*, you're immediately ride or fuckng *die?*"

"Yeah!" Tubbo shouts, and oh, Tommy's neighbors aren't going to like *that*. "I am! He's been nothing but kind since we met. You, however-"

"*I've been unkind?*" Tommy finds himself matching Tubbo's volume, energy, as the room gets tenser and tenser. "You ruin *my* apartment, yell at *me* over and over again, and you think *I'm* unkind?"

Tubbo's face is red with anger. "I-"

Tommy doesn't even see Ranboo stand, but suddenly he's between them, made of immovable stone, a hand on both of their chests, keeping them apart. His gaze is stormy as he

looks at them both.

“Knock it *off*,” He finally demands, voice shaking just a little. “We have to work together regardless of how you two feel. You can argue all you want later, but right now, we’re *dying*, in case you forgot.”

Tommy scoffs. How could he possibly forget that he’s about to lose Tubbo for the second time?

“Fine,” Tubbo forces. “You’re right. *Fuck!*”

Tubbo shoves past them both, clearly making an angry trek to the shower. Tommy’s rage is building, building, building. Tipping over.

“That’s my bathroom, asshole!” Tommy shouts after him.

“I got here first!” Tubbo shouts back, equally as aggressive. Tommy’s fists clench with impossible force, and he’s aware he’s gritting his teeth. Why does Tubbo listen to Ranboo? Why does he defend Ranboo, and not even give Tommy a shot?

Tommy looks at Ranboo, still holding him back, head turned to watch Tubbo go, and thinks he might hate him, if only a little.

Tommy discovers his own personal hell in the days that follow.

He texts Techno for the second time in two days, which he hasn't done since he was thirteen, saying simply: *tell phil to call me out of school for the rest of the week. i'm sick.*

*You don't get sick.* Is all Techno texts back, and Tommy snorts aloud. He does, in fact, get sick. He just never tells anyone about it. He's not going to tell Techno about it.

*first time for everything* , Tommy responds, deliberating on what he wants to say. He isn't sure he wants to say much of anything. He wants to talk to Techno so, so desperately, but he doesn't, not ever again. Tommy longs for a time when his life was simple, as he often does nowadays.

*You sure you're okay?* Techno asks, and *oh*, isn't that just *peachy*. Now Techno acts like he cares? Tommy resists the urge to send him a voice message yelling at him to fuck off.

He doesn't, because his self control is frankly incredible, and the universe should be proud. Instead he says, *i'll be fine*.

Techno reads it. Tommy waits, waits, and waits some more for a response before he decides it just isn't worth it.

Based on what Tommy is overhearing, Tubbo is drawing from some residue left on the net to try to track Casper down. He doesn't even want to talk to Tubbo, he tells himself, so he



takes advantage of his enhanced hearing for the first time probably ever, and he listens.

It's some technology that, once again, makes absolutely no fucking sense to Tommy, because go figure, right? Either way, what's important is Tubbo believes he can track Casper down, and they can finally wrangle him once and for all.

Then, all of this will be over. Thank *fuck*.

It'll just be Tommy and his cold, empty apartment, with too much space and too little laughter, dust collecting over picture frames he doesn't want to clean, containing pictures he doesn't want to see.

Amen.

Ranboo, Tommy soon learns, makes a solidly mediocre *everything*. He's the only thing keeping the three of them from starving to death as he throws together whatever old bread and meats Tommy may or may not have in his neglected cabinets.

The tension between Tommy and Tubbo is the worst, still simmering in the air, lighting up like a charge every time they're in the same room. To spare himself, Tommy stays out of whatever room Tubbo is in, which is mostly the kitchen, only eating late after Tubbo retires to the living room for the night.

Ranboo is more perceptive than Tommy originally gave him credit for. After the first few days of this, he starts finding Tommy late at night with a plate, making him sit down at the table and eat with him. Tommy doesn't make conversation, just eats and leaves, so Ranboo takes it upon himself to fill the silence.

He tells Tommy all about his life at home, who he knows, his past. Tonight, they've toed just over the line of forbidden territory. Ranboo seems blissfully unaware as he rambles.

"Tubbo's great," Ranboo says, around a mouthful of spaghetti. "I don't have a him at home, but I wish I did, because-"

Tommy didn't think he'd ever break his silence. He was trying to wait until Ranboo got tired of it, tired of him, and gave up. However, it escapes before he can stop it.

"Do you know a me?" He blurts, then immediately wants to smack himself for it. Ranboo's face falls for only a moment before he fixes it, and Tommy wants to smack himself again.

"Ah, yeah," Ranboo nods, jerkily. "Yeah, I... did. We were never... close."

*Were ?* Tommy raises his eyebrows just slightly, but doesn't push the issue. He wonders, offhandedly, what kind of history they have, how bad it has to be for Ranboo to act like this. Suddenly, he doesn't feel so badly about his cold treatment of Ranboo.

He figures the way he's acting, at the very least, is familiar.

For the most part, Tommy and Tubbo avoid eachother in a way that's almost impressive, with their cramped living quarters. They have a few stilted conversations, about the updates on Casper, asking where something is, things like that, but nothing that Ranboo doesn't usually act as the middleman for.

However, Ranboo is grocery shopping on Phil's card, since Tommy can't be trusted to feed himself, let alone two others, and there's no buffer for when Tommy mindlessly walks into the kitchen, spots Tubbo at the table, and freezes.

Tubbo freezes too, and they stare eachother down for what has to be a few minutes before Tommy manages to point at the contraption Tubbo's working on.

"I, um, like your arm... things." Tommy says, and cringes internally. "Metal spikes. Back spikes. Spider... things."

Tubbo snorts, like he can't help it, and looks unsure for just a moment, before he asks, "Wanna try 'em on?"

Tommy practically feels his brain reboot.

"It's just," Tubbo waves his arms wildly, seemingly trying to revise. "I need to test some functions, but I can't be wearing them when I do. At home, I have a special mannequin for this, but-"

"So I'm just a mannequin to you?" Tommy teases, praying it goes over well.

"Oh, less," Tubbo smiles, and it's easy banter, despite their uneasiness with eachother in general. They're both grasping at it as best they can. "Anyways, you're not attached to this shirt, right? No promises it doesn't rip."

Tommy shrugs. “I have about four more of the exact same shirt. I’ll be fine. You owe me a shirt if it does, though.”

“Deal,” Tubbo grins. “Stand up, arms out, back straight.”

Tommy does as he says, tries to keep still, tries to not feel so much like an experiment as Tubbo circles around him slowly. Tubbo slips his web shooters onto Tommy’s wrists, and then straps the arms to his back. Tommy can feel them, in the back of his mind. He’s... amazed.

“Try to spread all of them out fully,” Tubbo instructs, “And then move them one by one. I just have to test their functionality while I watch the joints. The jump messed them up, I think.”

“Story of our lives right now,” Tommy mutters, and Tubbo snorts.

“You can say that again.”

They continue to test them, and Tubbo even lets Tommy climb around with them in the kitchen. Tommy doesn’t know what kind of world Tubbo comes from that technology is this advanced, but it’s amazing. The longer he uses them, the more they feel like a part of him that’s always been there.

“Alright, come on down,” Tubbo calls. “I need to fix a few of the hinges. Maybe you can try them another time, yeah?”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Tommy promises, dropping from his ceiling corner, landing lightly on his feet in front of Tubbo. Tubbo reaches to begin the disconnection process, and then something clatters from the doorway.

Ranboo stands in the kitchen arch, staring at them - at *Tommy* , he realises belatedly. His face is white, hands shaky, and his grocery bags are on the floor. His eyes are so wide Tommy worries they're not going to stay in his skull for long.

Tommy and Tubbo exchange a look. If Ranboo wants to talk about it, he will. Tubbo resumes what he was doing. Tommy can't help but feel the shift in the air, like the winds are changing for the worse.

The damage from Tommy and Tubbo's immediate fight is overwhelming, and Tommy can't fix it all. He focuses on what he can - Tidying up the fallen photos, covering the dents in the walls with posters and picture frames. It takes days to work up the courage to clean up the corner with his old family photos, but he resigns himself to it eventually.

What he doesn't expect is Ranboo falling into place besides him, silent and helpful. Tommy will be the first to admit he's being rather mean to the poor guy, but Ranboo is still patient and kind, and Tommy curses how hard it is to hate him.

"Who are these people?" Ranboo asks, gently, as he fishes the photo out of shattered glass and hands it to Tommy, who holds it ever closer. "You don't have to answer, I'm just..."

"My family," Tommy answers, cursing his shaky voice. "The man is my dad, Phil. We're all adopted, and my brothers always called him Phil and not dad, so before you ask that question, I just sort of grew up with it. The pink-haired one is Techno. He's the smartest person I know, and he's scary when he wants to be, but growing up, he'd let me braid his hair every morning."

“And... the one with the glasses?” Ranboo presses, clearly still giving Tommy time to back out.

“That’s Wilbur,” Tommy swallows, hard. “He’s our oldest brother, not by much. He’s kind and funny and makes the *best* songs, and he used to let me sleep in his bed when I had nightmares, and then sometimes when I just wanted to. He’s...”

Ranboo makes an odd noise, and Tommy looks over to see his face still stormy.

“You okay?” Tommy asks.

Ranboo snaps back to reality. “I’m fine! I’m good. I just... Casper, when he phased through me, had this thing where I felt everything he did at that moment. Sometimes it sort of... hits me again, like an aftershock. It’s getting better, just...”

“Yeah,” Tommy finishes. He doesn’t think he quite believes Ranboo, thinks he’s not quite lying but not telling the truth, but he doesn’t have enough information to disprove it, and he’s not one for interrogation. Tommy lets sleeping dogs lie, sweeping up some more glass instead as Ranboo takes a deep breath, slowly, trying to pull himself back from the edge.

It had to happen eventually. It’s been building, despite their best efforts. It comes as no surprise to Tommy when it all finally comes to a head the first time Ranboo makes Tommy and Tubbo eat dinner together.

The food had been good. It's gone cold now. Tubbo is pacing, and Tommy is standing, hands against the table, and they're yelling at each other. Ranboo sits, terrifyingly still, knuckles white where his fists are clenched in his lap.

"You wonder why nobody is fucking here, man? Why nobody fucking *stays*?" Tubbo snarls, and that familiar burning feeling shoots up inside of Tommy.

"Tubbo, please," Ranboo tries, weak, obviously distressed.

"You know what, asshole?" Tommy spits, finding the fire inside of him and stoking it. "You are the *worst* version of you. I don't even need to meet the others. I can't imagine anyone stays for *you*, either-"

"You know nothing about me," Tubbo grinds out, freezing in place. "*Nothing.*"

"And yet you make these assumptions about me!" Tommy crows. Tubbo gets into his space, or maybe he gets into Tubbo's. He's not sure. He grins. "C'mon, big man. Do it. Hit me."

The window slams open, and Tommy and Tubbo whirl around in unison to see Ranboo gone, suit gone with him. All of the tension bleeds out into the night after him. Tubbo slumps. Tommy lets go of his collar.

"Fuck," Tubbo says finally, miserably.

"Fuck," Tommy agrees, out of breath. He feels lighter and heavier. "This isn't over."

Tubbo catches his drift immediately, and Tommy *hates* how intricately they understand each other, a perfect set even in their mismatched pair. He wishes it was easier to hate Tubbo, but he can't hate any version of a person who he let die.

Tommy pulls his suit on in record time, and looks back at Tubbo only once before he leaps into the night, searching for a somewhat-familiar streak of black and white.

## Chapter End Notes

finally getting this chapter done was such a relief because now i get to write the fun parts >:D

lmk what you thought lol!! this thing has taken a mental toll on me so any positive feedback will be absolutely treasured



# playing children's games in the dark

## Chapter Summary

Tubbo is sobbing. It's wordless, formless as he lets Ranboo hold him, jumbled apologies tumbling from his lips, tangled and unintelligible, almost. His eyes meet Tommy's over Ranboo's shoulder, big and teary. Tommy looks away.

For once, however, he doesn't feel the jealousy well up. For once, he's simply overpowered with relief: Everything he loves, the last things he has, all in one room, safe again.

When did these two, he asks himself, become all he has left?

## Chapter Notes

so sorry this took so, so long. i was having writers block, and then the news broke, and i just couldn't, for the longest time, but this chapter has been stewing in me for a while lol and i had to get it out so i turned on my broken families playlist and went fucking wild

this one is nearly 6k, and i don't know how this happened. genuinely. we're more than halfway through the story, and fuck i hope this is coherent lmao

this one hurt to write, folks, and it's gonna hurt to read. best of luck, see you on the other side, all that jazz. yell at me below if you've gotta. i definitely deserve it.

this chapter goes out to everyone who's hurting, and i know it's all of us, right now. scream at it, cry at it, burn at it, print it out and shake it at god, whatever you need to do. just do what you need to do.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy scours the city high and low before he comes to the obvious conclusion.

It takes until the sky begins to lighten before he considers it: Where, exactly, would a Spider-Man go if he doesn't want to be found? Before he really even puts thought into it, the answer hits him: Low.

All paparazzi photos, tourist posts, everything always has Spider-Man lounging on a hot dog cart, on a fire escape thirty stories up, on the Statue of Liberty viewing deck. If he was Ranboo, running from two other spiders with his same power set (for the most part), Tommy would go low, to see if he could fool them.

From there, he lets his brain go on autopilot, carrying him to the harbor. Sure enough, Ranboo is sitting, feet dangling over the water, shoulders slumped. Tommy gives a mental pat on the back to himself.

Very softly, Tommy lands behind him. He knows Ranboo senses him, but he doesn't respond. As a gesture of peace, Tommy puts a hand under his mask, waiting for his spider-sense to tell him to not remove it. It remains silent, and Tommy slips his mask off, raising his hands ever-so-slightly.

"You know," Tommy says, voice light even in the somber atmosphere, "You should be careful around that water. I've heard it can mutate you, with all the chemicals."

Ranboo snorts, once, and Tommy takes that as an invitation to sit next to him, slowly, giving Ranboo time to, he doesn't know, push him in the harbor or something. It's the thought that counts.

"How did you find me?" Ranboo finally asks, turning to face Tommy. His mask is off, but his hood is up, and his cheeks are red, eyes puffy. Tommy feels a pull in his chest.

"I thought of where a Spider-Man would go if he knew people were looking for him, and I figured low," Tommy shrugs. "Narrowed it down from there."

"It's a nice view." Ranboo's voice is hoarse, and Tommy resists the urge to hug him. It's not his place. Instead he smiles softly.

"It is, isn't it?" Tommy knocks their knees and shoulders together where they sit, ever-so-gently. They watch the sky lighten for a while, watch the Statue of Liberty framed against the new light.

After a long, long silence, not uncomfortable, Ranboo says, “You’re being nice to me.”

“Yes, well,” Tommy rubs the back of his neck sheepishly, sort of taken aback. “I’ve been a bit of a dick, haven’t I? I had a bit of self-actualization, I think, on the way here. I’ve... been an ass, and you didn’t deserve it. I can’t take it back, but I can start being nice now, yeah?”

Ranboo hums, nodding slightly. He’s kicking his legs absently. He goes silent again for a time. Tommy lets the silence hang.

“I can’t stand it,” Ranboo blurts, finally. “I have you back and even though you hate me, you’re still here, and then I walk into the kitchen and see you with those godawful arms again.”

“Ranboo.”

“I have Tubbo, the real one, for the first time, and he’s alive and he wants me, but not like the fake one did, for power. He wants to be my *friend*, and how can I say no to that? But every time he sits on the couch next to me, throws his leg over mine or bumps me when he walks past, all I can think about is the fact that it never really was him, was it?

“Ranboo-”

“It’s not in his inter-dimensional nature to want me, not like you two wanted each other. I’m never the one anyone-”

“*Ranboo*,” Tommy interrupts, mildly exasperated, finally managing to cut him off. Before he knows what he’s doing, he grabs Ranboo’s face between his hands and presses their foreheads together. “Shut up. We want you, moron. We wouldn’t agree to work with you if we didn’t want you at all.”

Ranboo's shock is apparent. Whether it's at Tommy's words or actions, Tommy doesn't dare ask. Ranboo's wide eyes and open mouth stay that way as minutes tick by, but Tommy holds his ground because Ranboo is melting into the contact just the same.

Ranboo's voice is watery when he asks, "Are we about to kiss? Because, man, I don't think I like you like that-"

Tommy barks an unexpected laugh, shoving Ranboo back, and Ranboo frantically wheels his arms in the air to avoid falling in the harbor. This, subsequently, only makes Tommy laugh harder, and soon they're both cackling until their stomachs hurt.

"Fuck off," Tommy is gasping for air at this point. "Oh my god, fuck right off."

"Still want me?" Ranboo asks, playfully.

"Yeah," Tommy admits, looking away, hearing Ranboo's breath hitch in his enhanced ears. "Yeah, we do. *Terrible* jokes and all, man."

Ranboo hunches, and Tommy scoots over, pressing them together shoulder to knee, the warmth a comfort in the chilly air. Ranboo leans into it.

"We should probably tell Tubbo I'm alive, huh?" Ranboo whispers. Suddenly, everything feels sacred - The way the sun reflects on Ranboo's strong brow, the way the city's bustle is drowned out by the water. The way that Tommy's never felt so warm, inside.

"Whenever you're ready, big man," Tommy whispers back, like it's a secret they're keeping in elementary school, like they're curled under a blanket at the sleepovers Tommy never got to actually experience, only heard about.

Ranboo hums. He doesn't make a move to get up. Instead, his hand finds the middle of Tommy's back, rubbing up and down, right over the spot where Tubbo's contraption had attached to his midsection.

When they climb in the window together, Tubbo is out of his seat in an instant. He flies across the room, slamming into Ranboo so hard he almost tumbles right back out the window, if not for Tommy's steadying hand on his back.

Tubbo is sobbing. It's wordless, formless as he lets Ranboo hold him, jumbled apologies tumbling from his lips, tangled and unintelligible, almost. His eyes meet Tommy's over Ranboo's shoulder, big and teary. Tommy looks away.

For once, however, he doesn't feel the jealousy well up. For once, he's simply overpowered with relief: Everything he loves, the last things he has, all in one room, safe again.

When did these two, he asks himself, become all he has left?

“You guys aren’t gonna like me for this,” Tubbo breaks the tense silence, and Tommy silently sends a thanks to the skies for it, “But I think we can find him tonight. I think I’ve got it, but we have to leave at, like, eleven.”

“Sleep is for the weak,” Ranboo mumbles, face in a cushion, halfway there.

“Whatever you say,” Tubbo snorts, and Tommy rolls his eyes, fond.

After some deliberation, it’s decided that the best course of action is to get some rest during the day, since they’ll likely be out all night, and Ranboo had made sure Tommy and Tubbo were aware that swinging into a wall or dropping ten stories would *not* be tolerated. To that, Tubbo had grumbled, “Yes, mom,” and Tommy had snorted.

Tommy is shaken awake to a dark window.

“Is it time to go?” He groans, rolling over. “Mm, little m’re time.”

“Sit up,” Ranboo hisses, quietly. “Now, Tommy, come on-”

Tommy instantly knows something is wrong. It’s not quite his spider-sense kicking in, more of an intuition he hasn’t felt in a very long time, not since-

Tommy shoots up, and catches Ranboo by the arms as he reaches out. “Woah, big man, what’s wrong?”

Ranboo shoves his hands off, continues reaching for Tommy’s abdomen wordlessly. Tommy grabs his wrists again, firmer this time, and says, “Ranboo, talk to me. What’s wrong? I need you to tell me, dude, you’re worrying me-”

“Lift up your shirt,” Ranboo whispers, with such terrified seriousness that Tommy freezes for a moment.

“Okay- Wait, what? Ranboo-”

With his guard momentarily lowered, Ranboo doesn’t give Tommy a chance to question. He shoves his cold hand up the back of Tommy’s shirt, to which Tommy flinches, and passes over the middle of his back once, twice, thrice. After a long, long moment, Ranboo pulls away and sags bonelessly.

“What the hell was that?” Tommy whisper-yells, grabbing Ranboo’s hands. Ranboo curls into a ball, despondent. Maybe it’s the fact that he’s barely awake, but it takes Tommy an embarrassingly long time to connect the dots. When he does, he wants to smack himself, but doesn’t dare move, for fear of scaring Ranboo away.

“We bonded, didn’t we?” Tommy tries instead, as gentle as he can muster. “You can tell me. This is... about your me, isn’t it?”

Ranboo nods once, curls into a ball, pulls his hands away. Tommy leans forward as Ranboo leans back, putting his hands on Ranboo’s shoulders, hunched over Ranboo’s knees to get close enough for comfort.

“Tell me about him,” Tommy suggests, and silently thanks webslinging for the abs, because this position is more of a workout to hold than he expected. Ranboo meets his eyes in surprise, and Tommy wants to wipe away the tear tracks, but doesn’t dare shift as Ranboo nods once more.

For a while, the only noise in the apartment is that of New York City streets, forever bustling below. Ranboo takes a deep breath in.

“I wasn’t lying,” Ranboo whispers, voice cracking ever-so-slightly, “When I said I didn’t know him well. I didn’t. I wish I’d known him before, more than anything, but I only knew him after.”

*After?* Tommy wants to ask, but he doesn’t dare interrupt. He’ll hold all questions until the end, like a good listener.

“He was a... failed experiment. His brother was a scientist, he told me, and my Tommy volunteered to test some tech - These big, mechanical robot arms. Not... like Tubbo’s. Not like anything I’ve ever seen. To save time, it went wrong. Those arms... won. They killed his brother and everyone trying to help him, and they were making him build something he didn’t know how to build... We’d talk and talk and talk, when he had control of himself. He was... sad. I wanted to make it better, Tommy, you have to believe me. I *promised* I would.”

Ranboo looks up fearfully, searching Tommy’s face for seemingly anything. Tommy is careful to keep his expression open, though his gut is swirling, urging Ranboo to continue with his eyes.

“One day, it was me and him on a rock, and there was no more time, and he was faster than me. I- I saw him sink, and then I never saw him again.”

Ranboo’s voice cracks on the last word, severe and obvious. Tommy almost feels sick - He thinks he can put the details together, the ones Ranboo is omitting. He can’t help that he pulls Ranboo into his arms before he realises what he’s doing.

To his surprise, Ranboo doesn’t pull back, doesn’t resist, instead folding into the hug, shaking, only a few gasping sobs escaping, as quiet as he can seem to make them.



“There had to have been something,” Ranboo chokes, “That I could’ve... but now he’s gone, and I close my eyes and see you with those *horrible* arms, and it’s so real-”

“I wish I could say,” Tommy murmurs. He doesn’t know what he’s going to say, just knows that he *has* to get the words out. “That it gets easier. Losing people. Truth is, it doesn’t. Funny how that works, isn’t it? Here’s the thing, big man. Even though it never stops hurting, eventually, you make room for it.”

Ranboo seems fixated on his words. Tommy looks into his wide eyes as Ranboo pulls back for a moment to search his face. Tommy’s heart is bursting, and the words are rushing straight from there.

“Everything has its space, my dad used to tell me. If he was anything like me-me, your-me doesn’t regret it, I swear, and he’ll find his spot and settle eventually.”

Ranboo’s mouth is slightly ajar in his shock.

“I swear that too,” Tommy finishes, rather weakly. He realises too late that he’s just bared his heart during Ranboo’s moment, and he opens his mouth to apologise, but Ranboo crashes into him, nearly bowling him over, holding on for dear life as he sobs.

Tommy clings back, and over Ranboo’s shoulder, he sees Tubbo facing them, laying on his side, eyes staring at them through the darkness.

*do you think ghosts are real?* Tommy texts, before he really thinks about it. Ranboo is asleep at his side, but he can't get back to bed yet. His gut instinct is to ask his big brothers, so the message to Techno is fired off before he can take it back. Instantly, the panic sets in.

*What?* Techno responds, too quickly. Tommy would be suspicious over it any normal time, but at the moment, he's cursing imessage's inability to delete messages, and trying desperately to think of a cover story. *Tommy, what's going on? How sick did you say you were?*

*nothing like that,* Tommy types, hurriedly, knowing it's not at all convincing. *new question. if you were given a chance to fix things with someone you thought you'd never see again, what would you do?*

*Seriously, what's this about? Why are you asking me this, Tommy?*

*it's not about you* , Tommy sends, and his gut twists as he says it. It isn't about Techno, that much is true, but a moment too late, as per usual, he realises how close to home that hits. *really, it's not.*

*If you don't start making sense, I'm going to have to call Phil.*

It's a very, very weak lie, but it's all he's got. *it's for an english project, essay prompts and shit.*

Tommy sees the dots appear and disappear one too many times, and knows the lie didn't make the cut. Even across the ocean, after almost four years, Techno knows him too well. Tommy wants to scream at the unfairness of it all.

*I know I haven't always been there for you,* Techno finally sends, and Tommy's heart drops, *But I still care about you more than you know. You can talk to me. What's going on?*

Tommy knows he's said too much. In a move that will satisfy him for the rest of his sad life, Tommy is the one to leave Techno on read, this time.

When it's actually time to go, after a few more uneasy hours of rest, Ranboo is the first out the window. Tommy is next, but Tubbo catches his shoulder. Tommy looks back.

"Since when were you two best friends?" Tubbo asks, and it's not kind. It throws Tommy for a bit of a loop - Sure, he and Tubbo haven't gotten along since they met, but they've been keeping the peace, for the most part, especially after Ranboo had ran.

Tommy's emotions are too unsorted, too unhinged for him to filter. Instead of being logical, careful like he has been, trying to diffuse the situation, he gives Tubbo a mean grin.

"Jealous?" He smiles, all teeth. Tubbo huffs, pushes him out of the way, and launches out into the streets.

Tubbo sets up probably the most elaborate trap Tommy's ever seen, using his weird futuristic technology, complete with trigger-able force fields straight out of a shitty sci-fi movie. Tubbo uses some jargon Tommy doesn't understand to explain it, and they all take up their assigned posts.

Casper arrives right on time, wanders into the force field just as they'd planned, and for a moment, Tommy wonders if this is it - if this is where everything comes to an end. Where he's alone again.

The force fields trigger, and Tubbo steps out, maskless. Casper slams against the barrier angrily, over and over and over.

"Hello, Casper," Tubbo grins, cold. "We have some questions for you."

Nothing in Tommy's life is ever that easy. Stupid thought.

Like clockwork, it all goes wrong in a second. Tommy's spider-sense blares, and Tubbo freezes like his is too. Tommy can't see Ranboo, but he's sure Ranboo feels it. Casper shoves one of his big gloves through the forcefield and knocks out one of the mechanisms triggering it, burning the glove to ash. The hand revealed is slender, calloused, near-unmarked save a scar on the pinky. It grabs Tubbo around the throat as the force field deactivates entirely.

Tubbo goes slack. Tommy screams his name, once, twice more, but it does nothing. Tommy can see Tubbo's eyes roll back in his head as Casper lifts him into the air and walks slowly but surely to the-

Tommy's spider-sense doubles in intensity, so hard it nearly distracts him from acting at all. At that moment, Casper tosses Tubbo off the building like a doll. Tommy is moving, moving, and he hears Ranboo scream, hears Casper's boots hit the pavement as he escapes, but his mind is zeroed in on-

Tommy is falling, diving, tucking in his limbs to move faster. He doesn't dare shoot the web, won't do it again, but he sees Tubbo, mid-fall, outlined against the streetlights below

him, and suddenly he's in a different place, at a different time, watching Tubbo fall, eyes wide, arms reaching, reaching to nothing.

Tommy doesn't know how much time he has left. He can touch the broken spine, can see the lifelessness in his eyes, can feel the coldness that isn't supposed to ever be a person, too cold to survive, too cold to wake up, broken and cold on the floor, and-

Tommy slams into Tubbo with too much force, for sure. He scrambles to get his arm around Tubbo's middle, and shoots a web up high. The force wrenches his arm hard enough for him to grit his teeth, but just as his feet brush the top of a bus, he's shooting up, up, into the night again.

Tommy doesn't want to look, doesn't want to check. He lands on the edge of a building a block down, the concrete chipping away, falling stories below him as he steps on it. He doesn't want to see, doesn't want to know. He doesn't-

Tubbo hums against his neck, and Tommy promptly bursts into tears.

He scrabbles at his mask, ripping it off, throwing it on the ground. He's holding Tubbo like a princess, a hand under his knees and a hand under his back. He weighs nothing at all, not to Tommy, and he hadn't then, either, but this time he's *warm*, so very warm, *blazing* against Tommy's spandex gloves.

Tubbo seems too out of it to respond - Briefly, Tommy remembers the way Ranboo had described making contact with Casper, as an overwhelming feeling. He doesn't bother trying to shake Tubbo to coherency, instead feels along his vertebrae, where they all lay, smooth and undamaged.

Tubbo isn't coherent enough to understand or comfort him, but Tommy sobs into his hair nonetheless, repeating the same thing:

"I thought I was too late, I'm always too late, thank god, I made it, shit, fuck, I made it, thank-"

Tubbo hums again, pressed against Tommy's chest, and Tommy feels the vibration. He can't stop crying - it's okay. Nobody is here to see it. Nobody has to know.

It's just Tommy and his second chance, all alone.

They don't talk about it.

Tommy didn't expect them to, figured Tubbo wouldn't remember, knows Ranboo is too nice to bring up the way Tommy had refused to let go, refused to stop crying. Even still, Tommy remembers, can't forget, and can't treat Tubbo like he has been.

This, of course, makes the unbearable tension somehow worse.

Tommy knows he's acting differently, and he knows *Tubbo* knows he's acting differently, and he can see the way Ranboo is itching to do something, but nobody makes the first move. That's fine by Tommy. He doesn't mind, he-

"That's it," Ranboo snaps. "I can't take this anymore."

"What's up?" Tubbo looks up from the book he'd stolen from Tommy's shelves. Tommy gives Ranboo a look like *don't you dare*. Ranboo gives Tommy a look like *try and stop me*.

“We’re gonna try something, okay? We’re gonna play two truths and a lie.”

“We’re not seven,” Tommy drawls, hoping to embarrass Ranboo out of whatever the hell his plan is.

“You’re sure acting like it,” Ranboo retorts, and Tubbo lets out a quiet *oooooo*. Tommy flips them both off. “You’re only proving my point, Tommy. Play the game. It won’t kill you.”

“I might kill you,” Tommy says, but it’s an empty threat, and everyone in the room knows it. Instead, he lets Ranboo arrange them in a circle, where they wait.

“We all know the rules, I assume,” Ranboo asks, and Tommy and Tubbo both nod. “Good. I’ll go first: My middle name is Bartholemew, I have two moms, and I hate spicy food.”

“The one night, you got this pepper monstrosity for takeout,” Tubbo points, accusing. “You don’t hate spicy food!”

“You got me,” Ranboo snorts. “Your turn.”

“Hm...” Tubbo taps his chin, thinking hard. “I’ve never had a pet, I can’t play the piano, and I... used to sleep in the same room as my dad, when I was a kid, because we only had one bedroom.”

“Piano,” Tommy immediately blurts. “I know for a fact you’re-”

He cuts himself off immediately. *His* Tubbo had been great at the piano. This isn’t his Tubbo, he firmly reminds himself. He has no idea if that transferred over, if-

“You got it?” Tubbo raises an eyebrow at him, as if questioning *how* or maybe why he stopped himself like that. Tommy shakes off the question. It’s his turn.

It gets dark, quick. It makes sense, in retrospect, Tommy supposes. They’re a bunch of teenagers full of secrets, bursting at the seams to tell them.

“I was born in November,” Tubbo begins, shaky, not looking at either of them, “I was orphaned when I was young, and I... I’m the reason my best friend is dead.”

Tommy supposes he gets it - he really, really does. It’s easier to spill your guts when you’re scared if it’s non-threatening - like a children’s game. *Shit*, he thinks. Ranboo was smarter about this than he thought.

“You were born in December,” Tommy murmurs. “My turn. My father moved across the world when I was fourteen, I have two brothers, and...”

Before he can stop himself, it tumbles from his lips.

“I may or may not have said too much.”

Tubbo’s eyes narrow.



“What do you mean, you’ve said too much?” He asks, and it’s dangerous. Tommy feels pinned under his gaze. He can’t respond.

Without breaking eye contact, Tubbo shoots a web and snatches Tommy’s phone from beside him. The passcode came up earlier in the game, and Tommy’s heart drops as he tries to wrestle it back. He knows what Tubbo will see. Tubbo holds his ground, though, forces Tommy off as he reads through the messages, and Tommy feels hopeless, hopeless, done.

“Who the *fuck*, ” Tubbo snarls, “Are you *telling* about this?”

“None of your fucking business,” Tommy snaps back on instinct, realising it is, in fact-

“It is my fucking business,” Tubbo seethes, walking Tommy back, holding his phone in a grip that’s too-tight. “It is my fucking business because you’re telling some *rando* about this-”

“He’s not some *rando!*” Tommy near-shouts. “He’s my-”

“Your *what?*”

“Tubbo,” Ranboo tries. “Tommy.”

“My-” Tommy stops again. He can’t say it, can’t, he won’t-

The air is knocked out of Tommy’s lungs as Tubbo slams him into the wall hard enough to cave it in. A photo falls off the wall, newly replaced, and the glass shatters on Tommy’s head. Immediately, he’s blinking the blood out of his eyes as it pours from his hairline, shards of glass sticking into him like Frankenstein’s monster-

“ *Your what?* ” Tubbo shouts, seemingly unapologetic, absolutely alight with rage. Tommy can’t fight back, can’t hurt him, but can’t tell him the truth, and something’s got to

go, something's got to give, something-

“*My brother, asshole!*” Tommy finally screams. It's like the spell breaks. All of Tubbo's anger dissipates as he looks around, and *shit*, Tommy's always hated how observant he was. Tubbo's gaze lands on the blood covering Tommy's face, and goes pale as a sheet, loosening his grip.

Tommy takes the opportunity he's given and runs.

He doesn't run far.

He can't bring himself to leave. Instead, he locks himself in the bathroom, hisses as he picks at his hair for glass, vision blurred by red and the hot tears mixing with it.

The bathroom, Tommy knows, has a small window at the very top of the room. He's not even sure it opens. He's never seen it used - it's why he chose this room. Even still, there's a light, careful, almost hesitant knocking.

Tommy scales the wall quickly, opens the window, hops down. “Ranboo, you could have just used the door-”

“It's not Ranboo,” Tubbo says, and Tommy accidentally wrenches a piece of glass out of his forehead in surprise, yelping in pain as he does.

“Shit, sorry, fuck,” Tubbo rambles, and it’s too late to shut the window as Tubbo somehow squeezes in through it, just barely, dropping silently to the floor. “Tommy, I’m-”

“You were right,” Tommy interrupts, short as he pokes around for more glass, hissing with every touch. “Will that make you leave me be? You were right. I was dumb and I risked our-”

“I wanted to say I was sorry,” Tubbo mumbles, sheepish. “That’s all, Tommy. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Apology accepted,” Tommy shrugs. “Mind leaving? Through the door this time.”

“Actually, now I want to help,” Tubbo argues. “Shit, that came out wrong. I see you’re having trouble with that. I’m an extra pair of steady hands. To show how sorry I am, can I… patch you up?”

Tommy’s breath catches in his throat. On one hand, he wants to force Tubbo out before Tubbo sees the tears, sees the weakness, says anything else that will shatter Tommy in the state he’s in, unfixably. On the other hand, the hand squeezing his heart at this very moment, he wants the friendly touch, the comfort, for what may be his only opportunity.

Tommy breathes out through his nose. “Okay,” He agrees, voice as numb as he isn’t, feeling too jumbled to even put a name to it.

Tommy sits on the toilet, an invitation, and Tubbo silently, carefully takes it.

The only noise is muttered apologies whenever Tommy winces, as Tubbo efficiently removes the glass, disinfects, and bandages the cuts, which are very small, for the amount of blood they’d produced. Finally, Tubbo gently takes Tommy’s face in his hands to wipe off the dried blood, and Tommy breaks.

“Ask me one more time,” Tommy begs. He can’t do this anymore. “Two truths and a lie. Ask me one more time.”

“Tommy-” Tubbo begins, looking startled.

“My entire family is estranged,” Tommy says, not waiting for the question, “Everyone I love is either across the world or six feet under, and I have pink hair.”

Tubbo meets Tommy’s gaze, and his eyes are filled with so much sadness that Tommy thinks he’s drowning. He can’t make it stop.

“My brother’s name is Techno,” Tommy blurts, and he’s going too fast, but he can’t control it. It’s like he’s vomiting out the whole truth, despite his absolute terror to do so. “The one I was texting. My life fell apart when I was fourteen and he was seventeen, but about to graduate. My father gave up on me, he moved across the world for work, couldn’t deal with an *unmanageable grieving teenager* and my brother, Techno, he went right after him. Got into some college in England, and then I was alone in this *empty fucking apartment* full of *all of my ghosts* and then- you! My-you told me to get off my ass, made me happy again, made everything seem smaller, made everything okay, and then poof, just like that, he was gone, and I was at his fucking grave, remembering how it felt to hold his *dead fucking body* in my arms, because he fell and I couldn’t save him, I was too late, and he only fell because he was pushed, because I was Spider-Man, and I-”

Tommy is hysterical, he knows, gasping for air he can’t seem to get, and Tubbo yanks him into the tightest hug he’s ever been in.

It’s just barely on the side of inhuman, how strong Tubbo is holding him, but Tommy clings back equally as hard. Tubbo is the only anchor he’s got, the chain between them rusty and breaking but somehow, somehow still holding on, and-

“My Ranboo,” Tubbo murmurs, “was the first one out of you two that I lost. We were best friends, all three of us, and roommates. I don’t know what happened, but he wasn’t himself, was arguing like it wasn’t just him in that big head of his, at the end. He was a monster, the *Black Plague*, a villain giving sickness to New York City, and then I caught him, and in the end, Tommy, he was in control again from whatever had him. He swallowed his worst plague-bomb, and he died in my arms, and it was horrible, it took hours, and I brought his

body down to the paramedics, so ravaged by sickness he was unrecognisable, and the headlines broke: *Spider-Man kills Black Plague*, *Black Plague Identity Revealed*, and *fuck*, Tommy, I don't know how you knew, but-

Tommy doesn't want to hear this. He wants it more than anything he's ever wanted.

"You knew about me, I had told you, and we spent so many nights on top of the Empire State Building, both of us, me in costume, you in a winter coat and gloves, long before we even met Ranboo, and you knew me better than anything - That is, you knew *everything*, about both of us, but-

Tubbo is barely making sense.

"But one time," Tubbo takes a deep, watery breath, "You got something wrong. Only one time, even though I'd never admit it. You told me to my face that I'd killed Ranboo, that I had put the bomb down his throat. You must have seen the blood on my costume, or the look in my eyes, or *something*, but you called me a monster and booked a flight for the next day."

"Tubbo-" Tommy chokes, but Tubbo shakes his head, not loosening his grip on Tommy.

"I have to finish," Tubbo insists, brokenly. Tommy can't stop him, even if he wanted to. "I wanted to say anything, but you blew out of my life like a tornado, the same way you came in. You went into the building where you'd worked to say goodbye, luggage and all, and something blew up, something broke- the building caved in on itself and everyone inside. I spent hours pulling rubble out of the site, and despite the city thinking of me so extremely one way or another, nobody bothered me. I pulled body after body out, hoping, praying, but-

Tubbo cuts off, chokes out a sob of his own.

"No survivors. Not one. I pulled you out of the rubble with my bare fucking hands, Tommy, and you were broken in every way a human can be broken, crushed and bloody and eyes wide, clouded, cold. I knew before I even got there that you were dead, in my heart, but I would never have been ready to see it. I stole your corpse out of the mess, and swung us up to the top of the Empire state, and then around the city, and Tommy, I held you for hours, and

you were cold and broken but you were still *mine* and I just wasn't ready to let you go, I'm still not, but the sky was getting lighter and I didn't have a choice-"

Tommy squeezes Tubbo even tighter as he sobs, unbidden and unrestrained. Tommy is sobbing, too. Neither of them can seem to stop.

"I handed you over, Tommy, and it's the hardest fucking thing I've ever done. I loved Ranboo, but you were my soul, my heart, my lungs, the first friend I'd ever had and the last one I ever would. I watched the paramedics take you away, and not one of them said a word as I swung away. It didn't even break headlines, that I'd stolen a body for hours - I think even the most slanderous tabloids knew that you were the most important thing I'd ever hold - and after that, I decided it's... not worth it. It's not safe to have friends, people who can't defend themselves like I can, in the face of people after me, and I just - *it's not fair*, because now I have you and Ranboo and you may not be *mine* but I think if time allowed me you *could be* and I would be yours, in a heartbeat, but we're never gonna see each other again after this, because we're not even from the same *reality*, and-"

Tubbo really is done, this time. Tommy knows it. Tubbo sobs into his shoulder so hard Tommy wonders how he has any tears left. Tommy has been crying so hard his head is pounding, and he can feel his ribs creaking under Tubbo's grip, and they're on the floor, curled together, and Tommy doesn't know how he got here but he doesn't dare move, and-

After what must be minutes or maybe years, Tubbo pulls back, brushes Tommy's bloody fringe out of his eyes, smiling through his swollen eyes and snotty nose, and holds Tommy's face again, so gently Tommy thinks he could shatter right here, and Tubbo would hold him together without question.

"No more secrets," Tubbo murmurs, pressing their foreheads together the same way Tommy had with Ranboo. His heart has been aching for so, so long. "If we're gonna be a team, a real one, then we can't have any more secrets. None of us. Deal?"

"Yeah," Tommy sobs, unable to help his grin. "Yeah, deal. No more secrets. Cross my heart."

Tubbo holds out his hand, crooks his pinky, and Tommy laughs, sobs, a weird mix of both, the most watery laugh or the happiest sob, whatever some poet would call it. Tommy's no

poet, he never has been, but he thinks this, right here, is more transcendental than even the best writer could put into words. His world is shifting into place before his eyes.

He links his pinky with Tubbo's, and they shake on it.

## Chapter End Notes

i fixed it jay are you happy

this definitely got away from me but i have a lot of feelings. i'll respond to every comment, so if you need to say smthn, get it out, or if you just wanna talk abt the story, you can do that too. stay safe, my parasocial best friends. i love you guys.

# gravedigger

## Chapter Summary

The silence at breakfast the next morning is heavy, oppressive, and laced with three different types of misery.

Tubbo picks at his food, not looking Tommy in the eye. Ranboo won't stop watching Tommy, eyes sad. Tommy can't stand it anymore.

Time to rip off the bandaid, he supposes.

## Chapter Notes

HHHHHHHH

school is back and im suddenly feeling it again. dunno why thats the decider but here we are. heres a rather heavy chapter for my like, ten devoted parasocial bestie readers. i love you all platonically and parasocially. hopefully updates shouldnt be this few and far inbetween LMAO but i just started senior year so like no promises??

anyways chapter tws for once bc this isnt my usual fantasy ouch. tws for implied underage drinking and drug (weed) use (underage in america anyways) and drunk driving/death due to it

take care, but its all just mentioned in passing so you should be okay promise

enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo holds them both for a long time, once they leave the bathroom, and they know he's heard everything.

“Oh, you two,” is the first thing that leaves his mouth when they exit the bathroom together, hand in white-knuckled hand, and he opens his arms. His eyes are free of judgment, and as one, Tommy and Tubbo tip forward into his grip.



The three of them are on the floor for a while, and Tommy has cried so much today that with his head pillowed against Ranboo's arm, hand in Tubbo's, he finds himself safe, *sleepy*. He's halfway there by the time he's scooped up like a baby and carried to bed. He has spotty memories of someone tucking his covers up to his chin, brushing their hand through his fringe.

He's safe, and he's asleep.

For the first time in years, he doesn't wake up screaming.

Tommy's final secret weighs heavy on his shoulders.

He figures it's not *really* a secret. He's almost positive both Tubbo and Ranboo know that he's hiding *something*, but he's sure they don't know *what*. Ranboo keeps shooting him knowing looks, and Tubbo is so careful with him that Tommy almost feels bad keeping it.

He's just... not ready.

He should have known that it would all fall apart before he was ready. That's how these things always work.

Look, okay, Tommy *understands* he's being unfair.

He knows Tubbo can handle himself. This isn't the frail, citizen version of his best friend he'd known. This Tubbo is equally as powerful as Tommy is, and they work excellently together as a team on patrol, and Tubbo can hold his own without issue, but it still isn't enough for Tommy's mind.

When Tubbo is pistol-whipped on patrol one night by some average joe of a robber, Tommy flips.

Once again, he *knows* he's being unfair to Tubbo and his ability, but he's *just* gotten this back. Sue him. He webs the robber to the wall in what's just short of a cocoon, and turns to Tubbo, whose mask is starting to stain dark. Tommy can hear sirens in the distance, and he stares at Tubbo for a second too long.

In silent unison, they make their way up to the rooftops. Tommy can feel the conversation in the air. He doesn't want to have it. He's not ready.

The moment they're steady, Tubbo pulls off his mask to reveal his bloody nose. He cups it in his hands, squeezes his eyes shut, and jerks. Tommy flinches at the cracking noise.

"Is it even?" Tubbo asks.

"What?" Tommy starts suddenly, not ready to talk, not ready to-

“My nose,” Tubbo says, like it’s obvious. Maybe it would be, normally. “Is it even?”

“I, uh-” Tommy nods, not as smooth as he’d like. Tubbo exhales slowly.

“Red, what’s been with you?” He asks, and looks at Tommy like he’s looking through him. Fully suited up, Tommy feels wholly bare. “You can tell me. You’ve been acting weird all night, and I’m worried... it’s gonna get you in trouble.”

Tommy opens his mouth, but can’t make a noise. Frustrated, he tries again, and again, but nothing. Tubbo is waiting so patiently, so kindly, and he just isn’t ready.

Tommy shakes his head. Tubbo’s shoulders slump.

In that horrible moment, Tommy is sure that Tubbo doesn’t think Tommy trusts him like he promised. It makes him feel a little sick.

“This worked last time,” Ranboo says suddenly into the comfortable silence, and Tommy looks up from his spot on the couch. “Just- truth or dare, Tommy?”

Tommy blinks, processing what’s just been said to him. “*What?*” He finally asks.

“Truth or dare?” Ranboo repeats, apparently sticking to it. Tommy studies him for a moment. It’s a question, an offer, but it doesn’t *feel* that way. It doesn’t feel like an option. He thinks he knows what Ranboo wants.

“Truth,” Tommy replies, doing his best to keep his tone even despite feeling like he’s going to collapse, bracing for the question he *knows* is coming, the demand he knows waits for him-

“Tell me about Wilbur,” Ranboo says, and the air is knocked out of Tommy’s lungs. He racks his brain, trying to figure out how Ranboo would know the name, how he would have such a specific question. Tommy isn’t ready, he’s not-

“Tommy?” Ranboo asks, voice suddenly distant, watery. Tommy registers Ranboo’s hands holding his face, thumb wiping away the wetness Tommy hadn’t even registered happening. “Hey, you don’t have to - I’m sorry. I... shouldn’t have asked, I-”

“You’re okay,” Tommy rasps, forcing his eyes to focus on Ranboo’s worried gaze. “I will tell you- I *want* to, I do, I just... need a little more time. I-”

Ranboo pulls him into a hug, gentle and caring. Tommy buries his face in Ranboo’s shoulder.

“Of course,” Ranboo murmurs, and that’s that.

*Wilbur strums another careful note out on the guitar, face concentrated as Tommy has ever seen it. Tommy is eight whole years old, and he loves Wilbur's newfound passion. Tommy is sure he's the best guitar player in the world, and he'll be even better than best with a little more practice.*

*"Wil," Phil says, smiling, peeking his head in the door. Tommy gives him a big wave, the way Jenn in second grade taught him. Phil waves back. "You sound wonderful, mate, you really do, but your brother has to get some rest, or he'll be too cranky tomorrow to listen."*

*Wilbur drops his guitar, and in an instant, scoops Tommy up, swinging him around as Tommy giggles. "You wouldn't do that to me, Toms, would you? You'll always be happy to hear me play, even when you were cranky before! Isn't that right?"*

*Tommy giggles, and Phil gently takes him from Wilbur. Immediately, Tommy switches to pouting.*

*"I'm not tired," He complains, and then he yawns big, because his body is a meanie. At Wilbur and Phil's laughter, he says, "I'm not!"*

*"I'm tired," Wilbur tells him, eyes shining as he boops Tommy's nose gently. "Why don't we both get some rest, so we can do more songs tomorrow, bright and early?"*

*Tommy considers this greatly, and finally lands at a reasonable conclusion. "Right when we wake up," He declares, and Wilbur giggles, pressing a kiss to his hair.*

*"Right when we wake up, sunshine, promise."*

*Tommy holds out his pinky, in the way that Wilbur's been teaching him. It means Wilbur can't break the promise, won't even consider it. At eight years old, this is the most important thing in Tommy's existence. He doesn't think he'll ever find anything else to love like this life.*

*Wilbur takes it, shakes it gravely, and then grins. Tommy's head finds Phil's shoulder as he's carried to his room. Maybe, he finds, he is a little sleepy.*

*No more secrets*, Tubbo's voice says, echoing around Tommy's skull for the hundredth time that night. *No more secrets*.

Tommy knows he has to tell them. He knows. He's not ready, but, the longer he ponders, he doesn't think he ever will be. He can power through this the same way he used to, has for years - sheer, angry determination.

Tommy gets up off the fire escape, stretching his legs, before he hops up on the railing lightly and aims his webshooters.

Tomorrow, he vows. He'll tell them tomorrow.

The silence at breakfast the next morning is heavy, oppressive, and laced with three different types of misery.

Tubbo picks at his food, not looking Tommy in the eye. Ranboo won't stop watching Tommy, eyes sad. Tommy can't stand it anymore.

Time to rip off the bandaid, he supposes.

"Are either of you.... busy today?" Tommy asks, near-flinching at how meek it sounds, how unsure. Neither of them comment, if they even noticed, and instead, Tubbo's head shoots up so fast Tommy feels the pain in his neck sympathetically.

"If you need me, bossman, suddenly my schedule is cleared," Tubbo tells him, staring him dead in the eyes. Tommy thinks he could cry.

The way Tubbo's looking at him is so unbelievably soft, a way Tommy never deserved, never will deserve. He revels in it, knowing it'll keep him going for the rest of his life. Even this is on a timer. Everything Tommy's ever loved has been on an hourglass nearly devoid of sand.

"Can everyone dress up nice?" Tommy manages, snapping himself out of his stupor. "Just... I'll explain when we get there. Find something around here."

Tubbo nods, and Tommy looks to Ranboo, which is why he can pinpoint the exact moment that Ranboo realises what's happened, the answer to his inquiry.

For a moment, it almost hurts.

They take the subway.

Tommy swears up and down that he would never be caught dead on the subway, hates it with a passion people who aren't from the city just don't understand. Since he became Spider-Man, he swings everywhere, and he's adamant (was, to his Tubbo, constantly) that there's no better mode of travel in this hellish crowd.

It really should have been a sign to himself that this wasn't going to go well when he suggested it.

Based off of the wrinkling of Tubbo's nose and Ranboo's tiny wince, Tommy guesses the other two aren't too keen on the trains either, but they don't put up a protest. Tommy surveys them - They're both dressed up as much as they can. Tubbo's suit is a little baggy, and Ranboo's sleeves are a little short, but they both took the time to comb their hair, Ranboo to shave his miniscule stubble. Tommy hikes his backpack up a little further on his shoulder, careful of the contents, and leads them onto the train with no words.

There's no protest, thankfully.

They come up on Broadway, and every step Tommy takes, the heavier his backpack gets. Maybe it's a metaphor for the weight of the sky on his shoulders, knee sinking into the earth, ears pressing his shoulders. Maybe it's his own psyche freaking him out - After all, he hasn't been the most consistent visitor. It proves too difficult too often - just another reason for Tommy to feel pathetic as he has been in the last months.

Tubbo's hand slips into Tommy's clammy palm. Tommy looks at Tubbo immediately, but Tubbo doesn't look at him, eyes fixed firmly ahead. Tommy is almost about to comment when a moment later, Tubbo squeezes his hand, just once, and Tommy, for once, shuts his mouth.



It's grounding. Tommy must be squeezing Tubbo's poor hand to death. He can't find it in him to care.

The familiar metal gate peeks over some dumpsters. Tommy turns the corner, and silently pushes the gates open, ignoring the twin breaths Ranboo and Tubbo suck in.

Tommy would be surprised if Tubbo can feel his hand, at this point.

Distantly, Tommy realises there's no backing out now. His secret is as good as out in the air. That's okay. For once in his goddamn life, Tommy is going to follow through.

*WILBUR SOOT*, the headstone reads, just shy below the growing moss. Under it is engraved a little music note, a quarter note if memory serves. Under that, in small, cramped cursive, *and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest*.

"Hamlet," Tubbo blurts, and then a moment later, slaps his other hand over his mouth, eyes wide. Tommy looks up at him, barking a watery laugh, and nods.

"My brothers, well, they were both nerds, growing up. Techno suggested this quote for the epitaph, and it was just..."

"Perfect," Ranboo suggests softly.

"Perfect," Tommy echoes. "They were in a production of it their senior year, you know? It was the one thing that could get Wilbur out of his funk, knowing he had rehearsal. Dad thought it was senioritis."

For a moment, the only noise is the gentle wind, rustling through the large, gnarled tree a few feet away. There's the chirp of a bird. Tommy unzips his backpack and carefully pulls out its only contents - some blue flowers, a little crushed from the trip here. Tommy doesn't know what kind. He never asked, and now it's too late.

“Well,” Tommy registers himself saying, bitter and fast, before he can stop. “This is it. My last secret. Final piece of the puzzle, yeah? Here’s my family - Dad overseas, low-contact brother, and his dead twin.”

Tubbo is gripping Tommy’s hand back, now, with equal ferocity.

“What happened to him?” Tubbo asks, so softly it aches. “You don’t have to say, but I think it might help if you-”

“He wasn’t... in a good place,” Tommy rushes out, and now that it’s spilling out, now that someone asked, he can’t make it stop. “It was... stupid. I know that’s crass to say, but. He made some bad choices, and my dad tried to talk to him, even Techno did, but he was so stubborn, so... I was Spider-Man by this point. He was the one person I wanted to tell. Now I’ll never...”

Ranboo’s arm lays across his shoulders, heavy and grounding.

“When I was fourteen, I was in an accident. He wasn’t... driving the car, but they were all as drunk as each other. It was late, so late, especially for when I was just starting out, and I was about to turn in, you know? I was about to head home, but the old police radio I’d nicked off an officer crackled on and told me about a nasty crash, and by the time I got there, EMTs were already taking people away. I didn’t see him. I didn’t know, not then, and I suppose it’s the one thing I’m *grateful* for. The next morning, my dad woke me up, told me he was in a coma, in the hospital. That he’d been in an accident. It only took a few days before he...”

*It’s a Tuesday night, and Tommy pouts at his big brother, asking for the third time when Wilbur will be home.*

*It’s not uncommon that Wilbur will leave late and return almost a full day later, smelling of the beer that used to live in the bottom of the fridge and something sharper, more sour. Nobody in the house will tell Tommy what’s happening, but he’s fourteen, not stupid. He*

*knows just as well as anyone else that Wilbur is doing a lot of “”adult stuff”” he shouldn’t be. His confirmation comes in the late night screaming matches between Wilbur and Dad that Tommy just can’t stand. It’s why he goes out most nights, now. He hates it.*

*Finally, Wilbur turns around, smiles crookedly at him, ruffles his hair, and says, “In time to make you pancakes before school, just like I promised last week.”*

*Wordlessly, Tommy sticks out his pinky, and Wilbur laughs. “When are you gonna grow out of this one, sunshine?”*

*“It keeps you honest,” Tommy says resolutely, standing his ground. This must be funny to Wilbur, because he breaks out in the high-pitched giggles that make Tommy so proud of himself to cause, the ones he’s always loved because it sounds like his own laugh, and they match, which makes Tommy ecstatic.*

*Wilbur links pinkies with Tommy with a genuine, happy grin, and Tommy squawks when Wilbur yanks his hand forward, wrapping him into a bear hug that’s half a wrestling match, and presses an obnoxious, loud smack of a kiss to his hair.*

*When Tommy finally escapes, Wilbur looks very pleased with himself. Tommy flips him off, and Wilbur snorts. “Okay, Tommy, whatever you say. Get to sleep early tonight, okay? So I don’t have to dump you in the tub and turn on the showerhead again.”*

*By the time the comment registers, Wilbur is half out the door. “Hey!” Tommy cries. “It was one time!”*

*As the door closes, Tommy catches one last glimpse of his brother, full of life despite his heavy eyebags and sunken cheeks, sticking his tongue out at Tommy with glee.*

“I’ve told him a thousand times, you know,” Tommy can’t stop. “That I’m... Spider-Man. I’ve told him a thousand times already, and I’ll tell him a thousand times more, because no matter what I fucking do, he won’t ever hear it. He can’t. He’s fucking dead, and I *know* that, but I just can’t... My big brother. He’s *gone*. He’s gone and I can’t ever have him-”

Without warning to even himself, Tommy’s knees buckle, and he lands hard in the carefully-manicured grass. Wilbur would have hated it, he thinks offhandedly. He used to preach about lawn biodiversity, and Techno would flatly tell him they didn’t have a yard to diversify, and Wilbur would dramatically monologue about familial betrayal in a way that would have them all on the floor, sort of like this. Wilbur would have hated all of this - The nice cemetery, the grass, the way his family is ruined, but Wilbur isn’t here. Wilbur won’t ever be here again.

He hears two identical thuds as Ranboo and Tubbo drop down next to him.

*Tommy thinks that the hospital tech’s beeping will be ingrained in his mind for the rest of his life.*

*He knows he smells, he knows he needs to sleep, he knows he needs to eat more than the vending machine chips Techno brings him. He knows he’s been neglecting his night job, but he can’t help it. He can’t leave Wilbur’s side, can’t betray his brother’s trust like that, can’t leave him here alone. Wilbur had never liked hospitals before. Surely now is no different.*

*Tommy finally gives in to the itch in his hands, linking his pinky with Wilbur’s limp, unresponsive one. The IV needle shifts, and Tommy whispers his apologies he knows Wilbur probably doesn’t hear.*

*“You promised you’d be back in time for pancakes,” He finds himself whispering, voice hoarse from disuse, in the quiet moments where nobody is in the room with but and Wilbur, the moments where there’s nobody else in the whole wide world but the two of them. “Don’t die, Wil. You fuckin’... you promised you’d come back. I’ll never ask you to drive me anywhere again, or steal your sweaters, or hide your picks. I promise I’ll be good, the best brother ever, if you just...”*

*Come back, is what Tommy can't make himself say. He can't entertain the possibility that Wilbur will die, not for a day or an hour or a second. His big brother is invincible, will always be invincible in the way Tommy was meant to grow out of by now but just can't let go. He's Tommy's Wilbur. He's untouchable. Please, Tommy begs no one. Let him be untouchable one last time.*

*Tommy puts his head down on the shitty mattress, next to Wilbur's shallow-rising chest. He doesn't dare curl up next to Wilbur the way he wants to, like he's just crawled into Wil's bed after a nightmare he can barely remember, for fear of hurting him like the doctors told him it would. Their pinkies are still linked, Wilbur's finger warm against Tommy's hand, the only part of Wilbur he dares touch.*

*He doesn't lay there for long, he swears. Just for a little while, he needs the comfort, the reassurance that his big brother is still here. In the end, he's not sure how long it's been, has no way to measure the time besides not enough. Not enough when the machine stutters, not enough when the doctors charge in, not enough when Tommy is all but thrown into Techno's arms, dragged away from Wilbur's bed kicking and screaming. Not enough, never enough by the time Techno pulls him to the door, by the time Wilbur flatlines, by the time the doctors declare the time of death.*

*Sobbing in Techno's trembling arms, Tommy doesn't ever fully register it.*

Tommy is warm on both sides as he's yanked into one of the tightest hugs in his life. Definitely the tightest group hug he's ever been in, considering his group hug experience is so limited.

He can't stop the waterworks when they come. It was, Tommy figures, inevitable anyways.

"It's been years," He finds himself sobbing, is in the moment and out of it, seeing through his own eyes and watching from a distance still. "It's been years, but I haven't had the time to--"

Ranboo's cheek is pressed against his hair. Tubbo's face is in his neck. Tommy squeezes his eyes shut.

"After, Techno left for school, which he called an *opportunity*, but he just was running, in a way I couldn't," Tommy rambles, and he didn't mean to say this much, but there isn't a damn thing he can do about it now. "He barely even said goodbye, and I was so- so *angry*, and Phil couldn't *handle* it, so he took a job across the world and now he's gone. I can't make myself call, I can't - *I miss my dad, and my brothers, and-*"

"Tommy," Ranboo murmurs, voice low and gentle.

"Sometimes I feel like I have nothing left," Tommy says, and he can't stop, can't take it back, won't. "I'm the wick of a candle that's burned off all the wax, and it'll only take one more light to-"

"You have us," Tubbo insists, fierce enough that it *finally* stops Tommy in his tracks. "You'll always have us, we're not going anywhere, not if I can fucking *help it-*"

Tommy doesn't know if Tubbo can help it, can stay in this dimension without complete decay and death looming over him, can really do *anything* but leave eventually, but for now, he's someone's first choice, and he knows damn well better than to question it.

*At the big service Wilbur would have hated, with all relatives he never knew in a grand coffin he wouldn't want, Tommy hears a distant aunt tut in shame and sorrow.*

*"He gave up on life," she says to her sister, shaking her head. "Sometimes they just can't help themselves. His poor father."*

*Gave up, Tommy will repeat to himself in bed that night, that week, that year. Wilbur gave up on everything - Life, love, family, Tommy. He wasn't good enough to stay around for, so Wilbur gave up on him. The most radiant, loving, amazing person he knew 'gave up'.*

*Tommy thinks he's close to giving up, too.*

Tommy hasn't seen his phone since the night of his and Tubbo's fight.

They return to the apartment in relative silence, Tubbo and Ranboo both holding Tommy closer than normal. Nobody on the train had questioned the tear tracks, or the dirt on their knees, or anything about the situation. When they arrive home, nobody shatters the heavy quiet. Tommy thinks they're waiting on him. He needs a little more time.

The universe, however, has never been his friend. Tommy can hear the buzzing just barely, even with his super-ears. He narrows his eyes, listens closely, and carefully treads over to the cracks in the wall, reaching his arm in.

Sure enough, he pulls the shattered electronic out of the wall, and his heart sinks when he sees the contact.

He picks it up anyways.

"Tommy," Phil starts before Tommy can even open his mouth, sounding relieved. "Mate, what's going on?"

*Wouldn't you love to know*, Tommy thinks. He forces his tone into neutrality as he asks, "What gives?"

"Techno called me and said you hadn't been responding," Phil tells him. "I wanted to check up on you, is all. He was panicked about it when I talked to him."

"First time for everything," slips out of Tommy's mouth. There's a moment where Phil doesn't say anything at all.

"That's... fair," Phil says finally, with a heavy sigh, and Tommy almost does a double take. "Look, mate, you're still my son. He says you've been acting really strange, and he's worried about you home all alone."

Tommy stays silent.

"Just... look at his messages?" Phil tries. "I'll... leave you be. You're always welcome to call, you know that."

"Mhm," Tommy hums, voice as emotionless as he can force it. "Bye."

"I lo-" Phil starts, but Tommy cracks his screen a little more with how hard he hangs up. Like the dutiful son he is, he opens his messages, to Techno's muted contact, and scrolls up.

If his heart had sank before, this is a death drop, a plummet that nobody survives. There's an audio message, not long. He clicks it, and the muffled voices confirm his worst case scenario.

*"Who the fuck," Tubbo snarls, "Are you telling about this?"*

*"None of your fucking business," Tommy snaps back on instinct, realising it is, in fact-*



*“It is my fucking business,” Tubbo seethes. “It is my fucking business because you’re telling some rando about this-”*

*“He’s not some rando!” Tommy near-shouts. “He’s my-”*

*“Your what?”*

*“Tubbo,” Ranboo tries. “Tommy.”*

*“My-” Tommy stops again.*

There’s a crash, brief static, and the voice message ends.

There’s more messages in line than Tommy has ever seen from Techno, even before everything.

*Tommy, are you okay?*

No.

*Tommy, what was that noise? Who’s with you?*

Nobody, Tommy wants to say, but he can’t get away with a lie this time.

*Tommy, do I need to call the police? What’s your address?*

Techno doesn't remember the address he grew up in. It doesn't surprise Tommy, not anymore. It really doesn't.

*Please, Tommy, one reads, and Tommy can't catch his breath. I can't lose you too.*

He wants to scream, to cry, to ask why this is so unfair. He wants a straight answer for once in his damn life, and he just wants to be held by his family like nothing is wrong. Hasn't Techno already lost him? Isn't that what this is?

The last message sends a spike of panic so sharp Tommy nearly crushes the remains of his phone.

*I'm flying home, it reads. I don't want you to be alone right now.*

Tommy's fingers fly into action.

*no, he types, full of despairing desperation. it's fine. i'm feeling better already. it's okay don't waste your time. i've just been sick, it's all better now.*

He can't let Techno get caught up in all this. Tommy needs him to be across the world, just to guarantee he doesn't suffer a scratch.

*its not safe to come back anyways, he near-begs. theres asbestos in the apartment, im staying with a neighbor, she was helping with my drama homework. it'll be clean soon, that was why i was sick, dont fly over its fine.*

Tommy isn't in drama class. He never has been, has never even considered it. It's always been too associated with Wilbur. Techno doesn't know that - he hasn't seen Tommy since before highschool even started.

Techno doesn't respond, doesn't even read it. Tommy is drowning in it all.

How the *fuck* is he gonna tell the others?

## Chapter End Notes

two more to go. only two. we can do this. let's go.

hope you enjoyed! this took me SO LONG lmao but the miracle of adderall on my adhd ass made it happen so here we fuckin are. lets go.

feel free to fight me in the comments! i will reply! sincerely your fav bitch kayla  
bonespell

# spectre

## Chapter Summary

“If he’s just a vengeful spirit, though,” Ranboo interjects, “then why is he so hellbent on using the machine?”

“Well,” Tubbo says, and it almost sounds reluctant. Whether it’s to play into the ghost idea or to speak up at all, Tommy doesn’t know. “Maybe, whoever he lost? Maybe he’s trying to get them back.”

“That’s the thing with ghosts,” Tommy finds himself saying. “They’re always looking for something.”

## Chapter Notes

this one is so short lmao and its not my fav chapter?? but it is doing what needs to be done so i support it.

hello parasocial besties. get fucking ready. get ready. next chapter is the one.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“And there’s nothing you can do to... stop him?” Tubbo asks calmly, hand steady on Tommy’s where it rests on the kitchen table.

Tommy shakes his head quickly, leg bouncing under the table with a gentle, constant tapping that he’s *sure* must be getting on Tubbo and Ranboo’s nerves. “I tried, I really did, it didn’t work, I-”

“You’re okay,” Ranboo reassures him, not for the first time. “It was an accident, equally as much our fault as yours. None of us noticed. We’re not upset at you, man. When’s his flight? Do you know?”

“I don’t,” Tommy replies, feeling utterly restless. “He’s still in class, I know the schedule. It’s... the term isn’t over yet, but it’s close. I think... we probably have time, just not a lot.”

Tubbo claps his hands like he’s made a decision, and Tommy misses the warmth of his hand for a moment. “Then we’ll get this done quickly, yeah?”

A beat.

“So, uh, what exactly do we plan on doing?” Ranboo asks.

“So we phase right through him,” Tubbo continues, waving his hands wildly in thought as he paces on the ceiling. Tommy hopes offhandedly that he isn’t leaving footprints. That would be hard to explain. Then again, so would all the wall damage that’s conveniently Tommy-shaped. “But he can touch us. He’s got *really* freezing hands, by the way. I don’t know if it’s the suit, it looked advanced enough, or...”

“And when he touches you,” Ranboo chimes in, pinning another notecard to the wall, the final nail in the coffin of Tommy’s security deposit, “His emotions... memories... whatever they are, overwhelm you, kind of like an electrical current of feelings.”

“Gross,” Tommy says, from where he lays on the carpet, watching Tubbo walk in circles. “Feelings.”

Tubbo nods sagely, and Ranboo turns around just so they can see him roll his eyes.

“Anyways,” Tubbo looks down at Tommy - up at Tommy? -, meeting his eyes. “It’s probably some tech making him able to do that, right? So he has to switch it on and off, in theory. If we can catch him while he’s, like, solidified, hit him when he goes to hit someone else, we could potentially get him. If I can get, like, a read on his gear, I could identify who - or what he is.”

“Can you actually do that? We’re on short notice here,” Ranboo interjects, notecards abandoned to look up at Tubbo. Tubbo grins, and holds up a web canister he produced from... Tommy doesn’t even know.

“My short-circuits will handle it,” He says, and Ranboo nods.

“Sick name,” Tommy says. “I can play bait. If he happens to get ahold of me, well, I don’t know what getting grabbed twice would do to someone, and you’ve both already been...”

Tubbo looks at him, disapproving. “I don’t like where this is going.”

“I’m the only one he hasn’t gotten yet,” Tommy shrugs. “I’m objectively the best candidate, aren’t I?”

There’s a pause.

“I don’t like that he’s right, but he’s kind of right,” Ranboo tells Tubbo. Tubbo sighs.

“What kind of distraction are you thinking?” Tubbo asks Tommy, in a way that suggests he’ll give in, but isn’t happy to do so. Tommy can work with that.

“Let’s stick to our brand,” Tommy grins, feeling like trouble. Ranboo’s eyebrows shoot up when he sees it. “The only way we ever communicate like adults is when we do stupid little games, so what if we ask if he wants to play tag with us?”

Tubbo cackles outright, and Ranboo buries his face in his hands, trying to conceal the laughter that shakes his shoulders.

“This is *so* stupid,” Ranboo groans, muffled, which only sends Tubbo into a second fit of giggling.

“Hey, Mr. Supervillain?” Tubbo says, high-pitched and mocking, breathless from laughter. “Do you want to play some tag with us?”

“*Stupid,*” Ranboo emphasizes.

“If nothing else,” Tommy tells him, finally pushing past laughter of his own, “it’ll probably be funny.”

They all take a moment to catch their breath, to stop laughing. Tommy’s stomach hurts. He hasn’t laughed like that in a very long time.

“What if this is a bad idea?” Ranboo asks suddenly, voice sobered. “Going after him? I mean, it’s not like it really worked out for us before, did it?”

“We weren’t a team then,” Tubbo points out, like it’s something normal, not a miracle in itself. “We are now.”

“All I’m saying,” Tommy whispers through his mask, “is that I’m *pretty* sure I broke that last time.”

“Then why is it fixed?” Ranboo hisses back. “Is Casper a handyman, too? It looks like, brand new!”

“No, he definitely broke it,” Tubbo injects, bumping Tommy with his shoulder. “Like, I definitely saw it.”

“See?” Tommy asks.

“No, I didn’t see,” Ranboo snarks, and Tommy groans quietly. “That’s the entire point of this debate.”

“Both of you, shut up,” Tubbo demands. “He’s here. Look alive.”

Back in that horrible basement, the one thing Tommy is sure of is he didn’t miss the smell. Just as Tubbo had said, the man of the hour himself waltzes onto the scene - Casper approaches the machine with a confidence so sure, it says he has absolutely zero idea anyone is here at all.

Good, Tommy thinks. He’s always liked the element of surprise.

“You sure about this?” Ranboo whispers, and Tommy almost doesn’t catch it. It takes a moment to realise the question was meant for him.

“Yeah,” Tommy nods, lying through his teeth. He’s not sure this is a good plan, not at all. He doesn’t have any other ideas. “Hit him hard.”



“Just for you,” Tubbo chimes in, voice playful in a way that soothes Tommy’s worried soul. Before Tommy can think of a witty reply, Tubbo jumps down, landing purposefully hard on the stone to get Casper’s attention. The stone cracks under his feet.

“Hey, Casper!” He says, cheerful. “Red here has a question for you.”

Tommy nods at Ranboo, and Ranboo nods in return. As he’s crawling away, Tommy drops down, light, right behind Casper, and right in the approximation of where his ears would be, Tommy whispers, “Would you like to play a game?”

Casper whips around, swinging for Tommy, but Tommy flips backwards, out of reach. When Casper’s gaze locks on him, and he huffs fog like a cartoon bull, Tommy grins.

“You’re it,” He says simply, and the chase is on.

Tommy acts purely on instinct, relying on the itching of his spider-sense to move his body for him. He continues to taunt as he bounces around, keeping himself just barely out of reach, watching Casper get angrier and angrier.

Tommy prepares to let Casper get a little closer, just barely not touching him. They need Casper to think he’s won, so that he solidifies, and the plan can work from there. Not to mention, Tommy is superhumanly fit, but even he’s starting to get a little winded.

He takes a deep breath in preparation, and-

There’s a strangled shout from Ranboo, and Tommy’s gaze snaps over to see purple particles dissipate as Ranboo’s image contorts unnaturally. Tubbo shouts, and moves to help, but his shout is replaced with a cry as he begins to glitch as well.

Tommy blinks, and his spider-sense *screams* at him, so loudly that he can feel it behind his eyes. Casper is in front of him, hand bare of its thick glove. Tommy can’t so much as react before it closes around his throat, just like that very first night they met, but *so much worse*.

The sharp panic Tommy feels is the last emotion he's sure is *his*. In an instant, his airflow is cut off, his feet are off the ground, and he's overloaded with sensation.

Three graves, names too blurry to make out. A faint screeching, not entirely human. The sensation of small hands in his. The sharp, cloying scent of blood. Bright lights, loud music, a strange fuzziness at the edges of his mind that's gone the moment it came. The taste of antiseptic.

Tommy can't breathe, can't see, can't even identify what parts of this are *him*, if any of them even are. His vision spots out, and he thinks he's kicking weakly, and he's going to die here, and Tubbo and Ranboo will be next.

No. No, please. He's not ready. He's not *done*.

"*Tommy!*" Tubbo's voice cries, pure anguish breaking through the chaos. It's so full of emotion that it shoots right to Tommy's soul. Distantly, he has the notion that being called *Tommy* in the field is bad, but he can't care as-

Casper freezes in place like he's been struck. Maybe, Tommy considers, he has. Casper's impenetrable iron grip loosens, and just like that, Tommy hits the floor, coughing and gasping and looking for an out.

From the rafters, Tubbo swings by, scooping Tommy up and launching ahead like a bolt of lightning. As soon as Tommy's senses deem it safe, he rips off his mask, continuing to inhale raggedly, in a way that *hurts*, chest still tightening with *not enough, not enough*.

His cheeks are wet, he registers distantly.

"I'm so sorry, T- *Red*, *fuck*, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to say your name," Tubbo hurries out, half-frantic as he hovers over Tommy, not quite touching him. Ranboo's hand rubs circles on Tommy's back, almost-imperceptibly shaking.

“Did you,” Tommy asks instead, wincing at how hoarse his voice is, “get the sample?”

“I mean, yeah, but,” Tubbo waves his arms, near-flinching when Ranboo gently takes his hands to still them.

“So that means it worked,” Ranboo says, purposefully calm. “We can touch him when he’s solid.”

Tubbo nods, finally seeming to breathe.

“So,” Tommy forces out, “What now?”

“I analyze it,” Tubbo says, breathing in through his nose and out through his mouth. “Tommy, I really am sorry-”

“You’re alright,” Tommy tells him, meeting his eyes steadily. “It’s alright.”

Tubbo nods once, jerky, as he exhales shakily once again.

Tommy finds his mind is stuck on the sensation of Casper’s memories. He can’t stop thinking about them. It’s not right, he thinks. It’s all wrong.

“Let me know if it hurts,” Ranboo murmurs, wrapping the bandage ever-so-gently around Tommy’s bruised, cold throat.

Even after the fact, Tommy’s throat hurts like it’s frostbite. He knows it’s not, but it aches. But it’s impossible, so it’s not frostbite.

“I,” Ranboo continues. “I’m sorry. I... messed us up.”

“What do you mean?” Tommy whispers, voice hoarse, scratchy. Ranboo winces sympathetically, before his sullen look returns.

“I tried to... use my power,” Ranboo admits, like he’s a lying child who stole the last candy bar. “My... teleportation. It’s unstable, even in my own dimension, and I knew that the glitching was getting worse, and I should have predicted that trying to teleport would...”

“Set it off,” Tommy finishes. “Ranboo, no-”

“Hold on,” Ranboo shakes his head, tying off the bandage. “I really should have known. Before you argue, my... I can barely even teleport myself sometimes. I’ve *never* successfully teleported something else. Even in my own universe, it can mess me up *bad*. I...”

Tommy grips Ranboo’s gesturing hands, holding them to his chest. “Ranboo,” He murmurs, keeping his voice down as not to upset Tubbo, who is focused in the connected living room. “You couldn’t have known. It’s not your fault, okay? It can’t be your fault, because that means you did something wrong.”

“That’s not what you used to think,” Ranboo says bitterly, mostly to himself, before he slaps a hand over his mouth, eyes wide. “Shit, Tommy, I’m sorry-”

It hurts, Tommy thinks, to be thought of like that. To know that he had that effect on someone when he couldn't control his own anger. Ranboo is absolutely right. That's the worst part.

"No, no," Tommy interrupts. "You're right... Ranboo, you know I never thought...?"

It takes a moment.

"Yeah," Ranboo breathes, shaky. "Yeah, I do know. Sometimes it's just..."

"I know," Tommy presses their foreheads together, leaning forward from where Ranboo had set him, on the kitchen counter.

"It's not possible," Tubbo says, from the connected living room, and Tommy draws back from Ranboo's grasp to look at him. Tubbo doesn't look up from his projected screen as he repeats, "That's not possible."

"What's up?" Ranboo asks, helping Tommy off the counter. Slowly, they come to stand behind Tubbo, one leaning over each shoulder. Tommy can't decipher a single fucking thing on that screen. When he looks over at Ranboo, the scrunch of his brows implies he can't, either.

"He has..." Tubbo says, half-absentminded, thinking, as he points at a cluster of incomprehensible data. "No vitals. Traces. Anything. It's not tech, he's- I don't know what he is."

Tommy is struck with a strange dread, like something he's powerless to stop.

"Not to mention," Tubbo continues, beginning to gesture in the way he always does when he gets worked up, the way Tommy's Tubbo had, and the way this one does too, "Whatever he runs off, whatever that *energy* is, it's the same stuff that's in... that's powering the

machine. I cross-checked, triple-checked with the stuff on my suit from when I first arrived, and I *swear* it's the same shit. It's like it's... using him as a battery."

"Is there another power source?" Ranboo asks, voice careful with consideration. "Anything?"

Tubbo shakes his head. "I really do wonder how much of this he can take before it kills him.

*You can't kill something,* Tommy thinks, swallowing, *that's already dead.*

"So you're telling me," Tubbo repeats for the umpteenth time, equally as disbelieving as every previous question, "That you think *Casper* - you know, the one we named *ironically* - is an *actual ghost*? Do those even exist here? Did I miss something?"

"Depends on who you ask," Tommy responds, frustrated. "Look, I'm no whiz like you, man. I just... until you, we didn't know there were other dimensions. Is it so hard to believe that there's something in this mess that seems like a cartoon-ghost?"

"There *has* to be a scientific explanation," Tubbo frets, grasping at his hair. Ranboo and Tommy both take one of his hands in unison, silently pulling them from his scalp. "One that's not fucking *ghosts*!"

“Paranormal sciences are definitely a thing where I come from,” Ranboo offers, and Tubbo’s gaze snaps up to glare at him.

“A *pseudoscience*,” Tubbo scoffs. “Don’t tell me you’re seriously buying this. *Guys*. ”

“Well-”

“Well *nothing!*” Tubbo sounds like he’s had this argument a million times. Maybe he has, Tommy thinks. “What the fuck do you want us to do? Should we draw a little circle and speak latin? *Tommy*. ”

“In his memories,” Tommy defends, and he’s not sure why he’s decided to die on this hill, really. “I saw graves. He was *angry*. Do you think he’s, like, vengeful?”

“I’d be more surprised if he wasn’t, at this point,” Ranboo mutters, and Tubbo swats him on the ear.

“I cannot believe,” Tubbo groans, dropping his head in defeat, “that we are entertaining the ghost thing.”

Tommy slings an arm over his shoulders comfortingly. “Maybe we should... look for violent crimes in the area. From the last few years, with three victims. Left someone behind. Family, maybe?”

“If he’s just a vengeful spirit, though,” Ranboo interjects, “then why is he so hellbent on using the machine?”

“Well,” Tubbo says, and it almost sounds reluctant. Whether it’s to play into the ghost idea or to speak up at all, Tommy doesn’t know. “Maybe, whoever he lost? Maybe he’s trying to get them back.”

“That’s the thing with ghosts,” Tommy finds himself saying. “They’re always looking for something.”

## Chapter End Notes

anyways, theories?



# please let me go

## Chapter Summary

Tentatively, Tommy puts his hand in the circle.

Tubbo joins without protest this time, wiping away a few tears of his own, gentle and hidden. “You guys are so lame,” He says anyway, seemingly unable to resist.

“Let’s do this,” Ranboo smiles, sure despite everything around them, “one last time.”

Tommy wipes the last of the water from his eyes, and tugs his mask back on. One last time.

## Chapter Notes

holy shit. this chapter is 13.4k, and i wrote it in two sittings. i can't feel my wrist. i have so much homework. i have to shower. i have to eat. i dont know what happened here LMAO but its done. im insane

you guys were actually pretty good theorizers this time! better than you were at SAD (except you, peppertoad, if you're reading this, know that you still terrify me). either that means i did my job better or worse i'm not sure which.

anyways, get tissues. just... just trust me. good luck parasocial besties see you on the other side

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For a while, all that comes up is dead ends.

“Anything?” Tubbo asks for the millionth time, and Ranboo gives a disheartened thumbs down. Tommy feels his own shoulders slump, disappointed in spite of himself.

“Not a single crime that fits the bill,” Tommy sighs. “If I have to scroll through one more police report, I will die.”

“Well, we can’t have that,” Ranboo’s voice is muffled on the couch, from where he’s face-down, having utterly given up. “Guess we better stop!”

Tubbo looks up at both of them, eyes narrowed. “How do you guys get your information usually?”

“Hit people,” Tommy shrugs.

“Hit the *right* people,” Ranboo corrects.

Tommy turns to look at him, eyebrows raised. “How do you know who’s the right person if you don’t just hit your suspects?”

“Some superhero you are,” Tubbo snorts, seemingly fighting a smile. Tommy widens his eyes purposefully, staring hard, and Tubbo gives up, letting himself grin. “I mean, honestly.”

“Not a hero,” Tommy jokes. “Haven’t you heard JMM and the Daily Bugle lately? I’m a Spider-Menace, a rogue, dangerous vigilante. I’m *scary*, Tubs.”

“Sure you are,” Tubbo says, shaking his head, grin not wavering for a moment. “Seriously though - Does anyone have any ideas? I’ll even do a game at this point.”

“Do you know the rules to Green Glass Door?” Tommy asks, after a moment of consideration. Ranboo shakes his head with a soft noise, and Tommy gets no confirmation from Tubbo, so he decides it’s probably best to explain.

“So, some things could go through the green glass door. Grass, but not flowers. A happy person, but not a sad one. There’s a rule. You need to figure it out.”

“And... how is this supposed to help?” Tubbo questions. “I’m sure there’s a reason, boss man, I’m just... not following.”

“Ditto,” Ranboo says, face back on the cushion.

“Brainstorming,” Tommy shrugs. “Plus, our ideas seem to flow better when we’re doing something stupid to begin with. At least this one doesn’t include potential bodily harm, yeah?”

“I take offense to that,” Tubbo raises a hand, briefly. “Anyways, I wanna go first. Could... a pig go through the green glass door?”

“Nope,” Tommy pops the ‘p’ sound. “Ranboo?”

“A bird.”

Tommy shakes his head. “Not a bird, no.”

“A... sheep,” Tubbo suggests, and Tommy nods. “Wait, seriously?”

“Okay, okay, my turn,” Ranboo lifts his head up, turning to look at them, propping himself up on his elbows. “A... weed. Like, from the garden.”

Tommy nods again.

“Oh!” Tubbo exclaims, and Tommy can almost see the cartoon lightbulb that would appear over his head. “Okay, um, a carefree person, and a stressed person, but not a lonely one.”

“Bingo,” Tommy grins, and Tubbo’s eyes light up. “What’s the rule, Tubso?”

“Double-lettered words,” Tubbo crows, and Tommy nods. “My turn to change the rule?”

At Tommy’s subsequent nod, Tubbo rubs his hands together like a movie villain. Maybe Tommy shouldn’t have enabled him, but at least he can see the gears in Tubbo’s head turning now - closer to any conclusion than they’ve been yet.

“Alright, so...”

“He was confused,” Ranboo murmurs, eyes faraway. The light is low in the apartment, the sun tucking itself behind swaying skyscrapers and impenetrable iron towers. “That was... the thing I could feel most. His confusion... and his resolve.”

Tommy nods. “He was... overwhelmed, too. Something about him was...” *Familiar.*

“Was?” Tubbo prompts.

“Oh, uh... strange,” Tommy says. “He wasn’t right.”

“That much, I can agree on,” Tubbo tilts his head, tone sympathetic. “Maybe... maybe he can’t move on because he doesn’t know why he’s here?”

“Something about his memories felt odd,” Ranboo agrees. “Too stiff.”

“Stiff goes through the green glass doors,” Tubbo murmurs, offhanded and probably to himself. It makes Tommy smile, but then he registers Ranboo’s wording, and the faint curve of his lips disappears.

*The graves*, Tommy feels. Something about them had felt different - The only part of Casper’s thoughts that hadn’t felt the same, like it was something he knew and was just out of his reach. The graves didn’t feel... okay, not at all. Something Tommy had never known.

“Tommy?” Tubbo waves his hand gently in Tommy’s vision, snapping him back to reality. “You okay, man? You totally zoned for a minute there.”

“I’m alright,” Tommy says quickly.

Tubbo looks at him in a way Tommy can’t describe. “Do you have anything, then? To add? How did it feel for you besides... odd? Confused?”

“Uh, nothing else,” Tommy shakes his head, a little too hard. “Just... those.”

Tommy is lying again. He knows what he’s doing, he knows he’s breaking a pinky promise. He knows he’s not allowed to do that, but-

*You know*, his traitorous mind whispers, *those promises never really last*.

Tommy will tell the others. He *will*. He just... has to sort out his own thoughts first. He has to figure out what’s *wrong* - with Casper, with the memories, with himself.

Tommy is shaken out of his thoughts as his spider-sense sets off, loud and sudden. Tubbo jerks at that same moment, and Ranboo all but throws himself off the couch as a picture frame above it shakes loose, crashing down.

It takes Tommy an embarrassing moment too long to realise what's happening. The city shakes under their unsteady feet, the air filled with a low thrumming.

All too soon, Tommy realises, they're out of time.

Tommy is practically choking on all the panic in the air.

The screaming tears at his skin like spindly hands, starved fingers reaching for salvation. Tommy keeps his eyes firmly ahead, shooting over the maze of streets, ignoring the fearful cries of his name. There's no time. There's no time.

Ahead of him, Ranboo takes a sharp turn, rolling and landing hard onto a building's roof, narrowly missing someone's haphazardly-hung laundry line. Tommy is quick to follow him into the laundry circle, and he can feel Tubbo on his heels.

Safely shielded from the eyes of citizens by a colourful assortment of dress shirts, Ranboo pulls off his mask and looks the both of them in the eyes, jaw set in a carved line.

"What's our plan?" He asks, firm in a way the very ground beneath their feet isn't, and Tommy latches onto it like a sailor gone overboard. The waves will smash him to bits against

the hull if he doesn't. "Because that machine? It's on."

"We don't have a plan," Tubbo frets, grabbing at his hair as his mask retracts. "We don't even know why Casper has this thing, much less what it is or how it runs, besides *on Casper!* We're not-"

Tommy takes both of Tubbo's hands, pulling them away from his hair, mask forgotten on the ground. Tubbo shoots him a wide-eyed look, like a deer in headlights, bracing for impact. Tommy does his best to look calming. He doesn't think it's working.

"We just- We just need to break it," Ranboo forces out, hands twisting, grasping at nothing. "Smash that stupid box to bits. Take it away from Casper. Once it's gone, he can't bring it back, right?"

"I don't know," Tubbo shakes his head wildly. "I don't know!"

"You don't need to know," Ranboo replies, and Tommy thinks it's an attempt at placating. "We'll improvise, alright? Just like we always do."

"Cause *that* always works out so well," Tubbo mutters, but he's starting to nod. A thought strikes Tommy like a bolt of lightning, fast and electrifying.

"If we break that thing," He says quickly, rushing it out, unable to slow down, "you two can't go home. You die here, don't you? If you can't go home?"

Tubbo and Ranboo exchange a look for a moment too long. All this pressure inside of Tommy boils over at last.

"What are you not *telling* me?" He snaps, and both of their guilty gazes lock back on him in unison. "*What is it?*"

“We, uh,” Ranboo stammers.

“We’re all so bad at being honest,” Tubbo interjects, trying for funny but falling *so* short that Tommy almost cringes. Tubbo *does* wince. “We’re, uh...”

“We discussed it,” Ranboo finishes. “We decided we’d be okay if we... didn’t make it back. So long as your city...”

“*No*,” Tommy demands, and it tears itself from his throat in a way that causes both Tubbo and Ranboo to take a step back. “No, no, no. You can’t- I won’t let you *die*, not in front of me, not *again*-”

“It’s this or your city!” Tubbo argues, and it’s earnest, and Tommy feels like they’ve fallen into a sick, familiar tune. “You can’t be so-”

“*You* can’t ask me to make that choice!” Tommy finds himself shouting, fists clenched hard enough that he thinks the spandex covering his nails is about to break. “That’s not fair!”

“Newsflash,” Tubbo growls. “Neither is this. I don’t want to ask you to make it, but what choice do I - or you - really have?”

“*Fuck* the city!” Tommy screams, and it’s too loud, too much. He ignores Ranboo and Tubbo’s twin shocked expressions. “What good has it ever done me, really?”

A beat.

“You don’t mean that,” Tubbo barely whispers, voice hoarse in a way it shouldn’t be, not after this little fighting, not after one round.

“Don’t I?” Tommy snaps, with the last of the fight left in him, all draining from his ears at Tubbo’s broken look. “I...”



Tommy scrubs at his eyes. He's horrified to find his gloves coming back damp.

"I don't," Tommy murmurs, staring down at his tear-stained fingers like they're covered in blood. "I don't mean it. I just..."

Ranboo's arms are around him in a moment.

"I can't lose you again," Tommy chokes out, taking a deep breath, refusing to fully cry, not now. Not when there's still work to do. "I can't survive it. Not this time."

Tubbo slams into Tommy's side, joining the hug with utter, clear desperation.

"Please trust us," Ranboo says, into Tommy's hair. "Please. We'll find a way, but right now, if we leave this, it's gonna tear the whole city apart."

Tommy doesn't want to trust. That has never ended well for him, trusting blindly. He doesn't want to hope, to pray to something he can't believe in, because otherwise it would mean he's done something wrong to deserve this. He doesn't want to rely on maybes, the way he has been for years.

"Okay," Tommy replies, in utter spite of himself, breaking away from the hug. "We'd better..."

"Hey," Ranboo says, soft, and Tommy turns back. Ranboo stands there, hand out, palm facing the ground, haloed in late afternoon light like an angel.

Tentatively, Tommy puts his hand in the circle.

Tubbo joins without protest this time, wiping away a few tears of his own, gentle and hidden. “You guys are so lame,” He says anyway, seemingly unable to resist.

“Let’s do this,” Ranboo smiles, sure despite everything around them, “one last time.”

Tommy wipes the last of the water from his eyes, and tugs his mask back on. One last time.

Sure e-fucking-nough, Casper is fiddling with the dials when the trio climbs down into the rafters.

It doesn’t take whispered planning, scheming on a time limit. For the first time in his life, inexplicably, Tommy is sure of his next move. Whatever he does, Tubbo and Ranboo will watch his six. Whatever he does, he’s indubitably secure.

Tommy drops down to the cracked, uneven stone, pebbles bouncing around with the strength of the tremors here. Tommy is thankful for his supernatural balance and his stick-ability, because he’s positive he wouldn’t be able to stay standing here without it.

Tubbo drops next to him, silent and sure. Tommy has an *incredible* idea.

“Hey, Tubs,” Tommy grins under the spandex, cocking a hip, an effort to look relaxed, unbothered. Casper whips around. “Why are ghosts *terrible* liars?”

“I dunno, Red. Why?” Tubbo replies, mirroring Tommy’s pose without missing a beat.

“Because you can *see right through them!*” Tommy cackles, and Tubbo slaps his knee dramatically. Casper huffs out of his mask, and lunges. Tommy and Tubbo dive in opposite directions, and the chase is on.

“Oh, I have one!” Ranboo calls, swinging above them, doing what Tommy can only guess is surveying the room for what to do. “What’s the best place for a ghost to go on holiday?”

“Where, Boo?” Tommy asks, and then snorts. “Ha, Boo!”

“Good one!” Ranboo replies. “The best place for a ghost to go on holiday is the *Dead Sea!*”

On cue, Tommy and Tubbo crack up. Casper is clearly beginning to get aggravated, and Tommy finds that he’s pleased. His stupid plan is working like a charm. A few more, and Tommy is sure Casper will start to get reckless.

“I have the ghost joke to end all ghost jokes,” Tubbo announces, solemn as he dodges right out of the way of Casper’s reaching glove. Now that Tommy’s looking for it, he can see the slight change in the way light reflects around him - a telltale sign that he’s turning solid.

“Why, *boo* tell!” Tommy calls back, tone light and overdramatic. Tubbo and Ranboo laugh in a way that’s very clearly staged, like an old woman chortling on a late night comedy show.

“What’s a little ghost’s favourite game?” Tubbo asks, jerking his hand in a way that tells Tommy to jump. Casper hurtles under him not a moment later.

“I’m stumped,” Ranboo says, scratching his chin comically. “What?”

“Hide and *shriek!*” Tubbo shouts, and Tommy and Ranboo break into that same, played-up laughter. Casper lunges for Ranboo without any calculation to his movements. Tommy knows, right there, that he’s got him.

“If you want me,” Tommy taunts, “you’re gonna have to grab me.”

Tommy zips up to the rafters, falling in time with Ranboo for just long enough to explain.

“See how the light around him changes when he shifts from solid to not?” Tommy murmurs. “Tell Tubbo. He has to be solid to operate that thing.”

“Holy shit,” Ranboo gasps. “You’re-”

“Amazing, I know,” Tommy teases. “Tell me once this is over, okay? Heads up, on your nine!”

Tommy and Ranboo split once again, both dropping from their webs as Casper hurtles through where they were a moment ago. Tommy lands on the console, and the beam splutters for a split-second from impact. He holds his hands up to his ears, shaking them, and Casper lunges again.

Tommy is out of the way in a moment. Casper, fully solid, slams into the machine, and Tommy sees it miss a beat again, the smallest gap in the beam of light. Bullseye.

Tommy should have known he’d flown too close to the sun. Really, he should have guessed. Things were going *too* well for him.

The way Casper pulls himself up, standing and brushing off his coat before the lighting around him changes once again, strikes a chord deep in Tommy’s heart. He hesitates, just a moment too long. This time, when Casper lunges, he doesn’t move in time. Tommy braces himself.

Ranboo appears in a flash of purple, knocking Tommy out of the way. Tommy can see Ranboo physically convulse, and knows what's about to happen as Tubbo freezes in place too.

Tommy, in a heartbeat, pushes Ranboo across the rumbling floor, ignoring the cracks spiderwebbing their way under his feet. He stands up, in Casper's way. This is a *stupid* plan, and not the kind that gets them places, but it's the only one he's got.

Tubbo senses it a moment before Tommy moves. "Red, *no!*" He cries out, reaching out as his hands begin to distort. "You don't-"

Casper lunges. Tubbo cuts off with an odd gurgle as the glitch overwhelms him. The light fractals around Casper shift shape, stretching until it's *right*.

Tommy holds his ground.

The moment Casper is upon him is one Tommy doesn't think he'll ever feel again, won't feel anything like this twice. Even as the pain and confusion and sadness and rage flood in, Tommy wrestles back, catching Casper's upper arms, shoving him away. Casper seems so startled, for a moment, that he flies back, landing hard on the edge of the carved, charred valley in the condemned foundations.

Tommy doesn't let up, throwing himself onto Casper once more, wrestling him to the ground. If not for the overwhelming feeling, Tommy thinks he could win a fight in pure strength easily. He's not at full power. He's not sure if he's going to win this one.

Still, he persists. Tommy just has to wait out the glitch, long enough for his friends to get back in action. No amount of pain, misery, fear, will keep him from protecting them with his life, his blood, his love.

*You can't have them,* He tells the universe, gritting his teeth as the floodgates open impossibly wider. *Not this time.*

Casper nearly pins Tommy to the stone. Tommy hooks a leg around Casper's knees, preparing to yank, when he hears a faint, quiet, few guitar notes, something that was almost never there at all.

In that moment of distraction, Casper manages to slam Tommy's head hard into the stone. Tommy's vision shorts out, and he feels the floor cave under his skull. It's all he can do to not pass out right there.

In the end, he can't even help that.

*Tommy doesn't know how long he's been calling Wilbur's phone.*

*Finally, he is alone in this empty house-that-was-home. He's known it was coming for ages, and he's had time to prepare, but he wouldn't have been able to, even if he had been preparing for years and years.*

*It's storming outside, loud enough that it almost covers the horrible silence. It doesn't. Tommy doesn't know if it's his enhanced hearing, or if the quiet is simply that loud. All that moves is Tommy, a rustling blanket as he lays in bed, curled up, smaller than he's felt in all his life, truly alone for the first time.*

*Wilbur's voicemail begins speaking again, and Tommy bites his lip, so as not to sob. He refuses to miss a single second of this message he has committed to his brain, a few sentences that are all that remains of his biggest brother, his hero, his idol.*

*When it finishes, Tommy rings again. He's been at it for long enough that his eyes are starting to unfocus from the screen in front of him, the only light besides the occasional flash of lightning.*

*This time, it doesn't begin. An automated voice tells him that this inbox has been disconnected, in the same formal tone that the nurse had informed Tommy that Wilbur was dead. Something he knew, but would never be able to hear. Curled up in Techno's arms, sobbing his eyes out in a hospital hallway, he'd never been younger.*

*Tommy tries again, frantic, gripping his phone tightly enough that he can feel the metal crunch. He drops it immediately, out of fear of breaking it. Why didn't he record it? He had to have known that Wilbur's phone number would have to be requisitioned eventually. Why didn't he record it, listen to it more, commit it to memory so deep he never forgot? Tommy tries to recall Wilbur's voice in his head, but finds he can't get the tone quite right, can't get the quality dead on.*

*Only then, on the third try, does Tommy sob, loud and broken, ripped from his chest, drowning out an automated voice telling him his brother is truly gone.*

When Tommy comes to, the first thing he sees is Tubbo and Ranboo, fighting with reckless abandon. When he shifts, he can feel the blood that's dried between his hair and his mask pull, and he grimaces. His ears are ringing, and he's still seeing spots, and Tommy is positive he has another concussion, but he doesn't let that stop him.

Tommy forces himself to his feet, dragging his body out of the bloody pool and to the console, gripping it so tightly he feels his fingers crush into the steel. He knows if he doesn't act, Tubbo and Ranboo are fucked. They're losing, the way they are, blinded by anger over Tommy's injury. Neither of them have spotted him yet.

Tommy finds he's terrified.

*Ghosts are a child's fear, he tells himself, scolding. Dizzily, before he can even finish the first thought: Tommy is a child. He's been hiding under his blankets in his dark bedroom for years.*

Tommy grabs a rusted pipe, loose by his feet, wielding it with uncanny similarity to the way that he used to "spar" with Techno, in their living room with an old broomstick their dad

had sawed in half just for this.

Tommy is so, so sure.

“Hey, ghost!” He calls, before he loses his courage entirely. Casper’s head snaps to his voice, and so do Tubbo and Ranboo’s. In a way that’s obvious, even against the dark fabric, once he really looks, Tommy realises that Tubbo’s leg is bleeding profusely. Tommy watches as he leans on Ranboo for support. “Over here! Eyes on me, dickhead!”

“Red?” Tubbo asks, small, terrified, obviously pained.

“Don’t move,” Tommy tells him and Ranboo both. Then, parroting their earlier words, “Trust me?”

It’s a dirty move, Tommy knows. He’s uncomfortably aware, to the point where it squeezes his chest to say. He doesn’t have a choice, though. They have to stay out of this. They have to be safe.

“Red,” Tubbo repeats, helplessly, but doesn’t move. Tommy looks back at Casper. He feels utterly ignited.

In one smooth movement, Tommy yanks his bloody mask from his head, and lets it fall ungracefully to the floor. He swallows, exhales slowly, and opens his mouth.

“It’s me, Wilbur,” Tommy says, unable to stop the shake in his voice, the tremor in his whole body that’s entirely unrelated to the quaking. “You don’t- you don’t need to do this, see? Whatever you think is happening, it’s not. It’s *not*. You don’t need to bring anyone back. I’m right here, see? I’m alive. It’s you...”

*Tommy*, He hears, whipping past his ears on an unnatural wind as Casper doesn’t shift.



“Tommy,” Tommy agrees, endlessly gentle as the mirage of Casper’s mask begins to flicker, almost imperceptible. “Your little brother.”

The wind curls through his hair, ruffling it in a way that very nearly feels like long, lithe fingers.

“You don’t have to do this,” Tommy continues. “You’re hurting people, see? You don’t want that. I *know* you don’t. You can stop this, Wil. I promise.”

Casper shakes his head, just barely, just once. The mask flickers away for a few moments, and then again. Tommy can make out the sharp curve of a jaw, dark eyes, a strong nose he remembers so dearly.

*Can’t*, the wind whispers, a secret just to him.

“We’ll stop it together,” Tommy promises, finding he means it utterly. Tubbo and Ranboo haven’t moved an inch. “We can do anything, can’t we? You, me, and Techno against the world, always and forever. You promised, remember?”

Casper- *Wilbur* seems to second-guess himself, mask disappearing completely. Even after a moment, Tommy can see with unnerving clarity that this is not the Wilbur he knew. It’s his brother, from his world, that much he’s sure of, but it’s as if whatever formed this ghost, Wilbur-as-he-is, forgot a few pieces, left important parts of Wilbur-as-he-was behind.

Tommy finds he loves Wilbur no less, no matter how much of him is here.

Wilbur’s ghostly eyebrows furrow. He opens his mouth, but no sound comes out.

“Together,” Tommy repeats, holding out his pinky. “Always. You still owe me pancakes after this, don’t you?”

Wilbur's head snaps up to meet Tommy's eyes, like an alarm has triggered in his head. Slowly, in a way that doesn't match the urgency in his eyes, Wilbur opens his arms.

Tommy steps forward, and then again. Carefully, he presses himself against Wilbur's solid chest, ignoring the inhuman cold, instead noticing the way that he's not overwhelmed, not for a breath.

*Together*, the wind whistles, as Wilbur's cold arms close gentle around him. Tommy hugs Wilbur for just a moment before he lights up, electrifying and impossible and ice-cold all at once.

There's a flash, so bright Tubbo is nearly blinded.

When it clears, Tommy and Casper- *Wilbur* are both gone. Nothing is left except for the bloodied mask, red-turning-brown on the stone floor.

Lastly, Tubbo notices that the machine splutters out, until it's off.

For a while, there's no words to say. Tubbo can already feel the wound on his leg knitting itself together again, and he hopes it doesn't scar too horribly, healing entirely without treatment. The machine lets out short bursts of energy, but doesn't power all the way up again.

"He's not..." Ranboo murmurs from where Tubbo leans against him. "Tubbo, he's not..."

“Surely not,” Tubbo shakes his head. “Surely Tommy wouldn’t let this...”

It’s as if their brains kick into overdrive in utter unison.

“We have to find him,” Tubbo hears himself say, scooping Tommy’s bloody mask off the ground, shooting a web at the rafters. “He’s waiting for us.”

Tubbo has played this game one too many times, the one with the false hope. His family, his sisters, his Ranboo, his Tommy. He knows the number-one rule of a tragedy of any kind.

*Death can’t be legally confirmed, he thinks, in utter spite of himself, without identification of a body.*

Tommy opens his eyes. He thinks he does, at least. He feels impossible, incredible, thrumming with energy not entirely his own. He just has to figure out where he is. He fumbles around gently, knuckles knocking against something solid.

Where’s the lights in this thing?

Tubbo doesn't know, honestly, how stupid he can fucking be. If Tommy's not dead, he very well could be dying, and here's Tubbo wasting his last minutes with a shitty memory of his own tech that *he* built.

"I'm an idiot," Tubbo verbalizes, sanitizing the thought so he doesn't get a *thwack* on the head from Ranboo. "I really- how long have we been swinging for, Boo? Looking?"

"Has to have been a while," Ranboo tilts his head, following Tubbo's light landing on a nearby fire escape, eyes trained on the dark sky as if he's trying to puzzle out the hour. "What did you... think?"

"I put a tracker on him," Tubbo says simply, and Ranboo squeaks. Tubbo ignores it, pulling up his hologram, flickering due to the dent in Tubbo's bracer. An easy fix.

"Can we go back?" Ranboo says, strangled. "You're *tracking him?*"

"Both of you," Tubbo shrugs.

"*What?*"

"After you disappeared that one night," Tubbo explains, not focusing on Ranboo's distress so much as pulling up Tommy's tracker through the damaged screen, "I took precautions. We didn't know where you were or if you were alive. I didn't *use* them before this. They just... made me feel better."

“I’m not sure how I feel,” Ranboo’s voice is sort of faint.

“Leave me and my spider-tracers alone,” Tubbo scolds. “They’re helping us. You have to be nice.”

“Yes, sorry, *spider-tracers*, ” Ranboo forces out, no less strangled than it was. “Sorry for the disrespect.”

“You should be,” Tubbo says easily, just as the tracker on Tommy’s suit is pinpointed. “He’s in Manhattan.”

That’s all it takes for both of them to take off, not another word needed. Tubbo has a sinking, horrible feeling.

Tommy has come to the conclusion that he’s breathing stale air.

He supposes he should be grateful he’s breathing at all, but he can’t seem to find it in himself to be anything but selfish here. There’s no light, Tommy is boxed in on all sides, and he doesn’t know where he is. He’s cold. What’s happening?

Tommy finds himself admitting it, upfront - he’s *scared*.

Tubbo has never felt so desperate, so afraid. Even pulling his-Tommy's body from the rubble, he had been utterly resigned. This whole time, he's been resigned. The hope that flutters in his chest, a little canary in a bone cage, is unfamiliar.

*Danger*, it chirps. *Danger, danger, danger.*

There's danger everywhere. Tubbo swings over sirens, screams, rubble in the streets of Manhattan, ignoring how the world shakes with aftershocks. Ranboo is hot on his heels. They have a mission.

Tubbo is so sure he knows how this will end.

Tommy screams any name he can think of. Tubbo, Ranboo. Wilbur, Techno.

He even screams for Phil, once or twice. Tommy wants his dad.

Tommy finds himself sobbing, sucking in his limited air too quickly. He can't help the way his body thrashes in the tight space it's in. He doesn't know where he is, how to get out, what to do. Here, his screams do not echo.

Tommy's hand jerks up, and he flinches as it crashes through whatever box he's in. He has only a moment to recognise what he's done before the thick, unpleasant mud begins to flood in, stealing the little space he has left.

He bites his tongue when he screams. Tommy finds himself choking, half on the soil, half on his own blood as it clogs itself into his throat.

Tubbo lands hard enough for it to hurt.

He doesn't care about grace right now, or appearances - he lands on the grass hard enough for it to ache, and begins scooping the plants and soil away with his hands. It's not enough. It won't be enough.

Ranboo is late to land next to him, but he brings a shovel. Tubbo assumes it was on some other grave, and he finds he doesn't really care, Tommy's stained mask discarded to the side as the tracker program beeps, incessant and annoying.

Ranboo plunges the shovel into the mud, and finally, they begin making headway.

It's seconds that feel like years, millenia. They dig deeper still, super-strength working overtime, ignoring how Wilbur's headstone tilts precariously forward. *Not again. Not again. Not again.*

Tubbo refuses to dig out another corpse.

Tommy is going to die here.

His fingers break the surface.

When Tubbo grips miraculously warm fingers through all the soil, he doesn't hesitate to yank. There's a horrible groaning of wood, a splintering, and a crack.

When he pulls Tommy out of the grave, he looks into what remains of the coffin, out of nothing more than a morbid curiosity.



There's nothing at all. No skin, no bones, no corpse. It's an empty box, swallowed by the earth.

Tommy is spitting out dirt, spluttering, and it's too bright to see. He hides his face in Tubbo's shoulder, unable to stop his sobs, unable to do anything but cry. Tommy doesn't know how long it's been. They hold him until clouds drift over the early-morning sun enough for Tommy to open his eyes, to adjust.

Tommy isn't sure when the end began, but he is sure that they're too far in now. There's no backing out, not anymore.

Finally, reluctantly, Tommy squirms back, and Tubbo and Ranboo release him from the hug. He looks down at himself, an utter mess, covered in mud and bloodstains he doesn't know how to get out of his suit. Tubbo is up to the shoulders in mud, and the white half of Ranboo's suit is... no longer white.

Tommy finds himself, last of all, to be thrumming with an energy that's too strong, too unworldly to be his own. He thinks back to Wilbur's cold, cold arms.

He knows what's happened. He knows *just* what Wilbur has done.

Tommy snaps back to reality when Ranboo nudges him gently, holding his mask. He points at a nearby theater, and just like that, the three of them are scaling it, in uncanny

synchronization.

Tommy realises that this climb is to catch his breath, away from the public eye. Tubbo and Ranboo give him space, pace a distance away, as Tommy *finally* surveys his surroundings.

Aftershocks run through the shattered streets. Tommy can't read the words flashing on the big screen fast enough, but the images that are usually ads are all news of the city-wide destruction. Wilbur's power presses against Tommy's bruised, battered skin, begging to be freed.

Tommy prepares himself for the oncoming argument, and gets to his feet.

In a moment, Tubbo is at his side. Tommy waves him off, standing shakily.

"You need to rest," Tubbo insists, and *there* it is. "Seriously, man, you just were buried *alive*. You've been through hell. You..."

Tommy shakes his head. "Tubbo, I- *we* need to finish this. We're not done. We need to finish it."

"Wilbur is gone," Tubbo says, and it's so soft it causes Tommy's knees to finally buckle. Tubbo is under his arm in an instant, grasping across Tommy's shaking back, and Ranboo takes up his other side, arm around his waist. Tommy can't help but sag into their grip.

"I know," Tommy coughs, spitting a glob of blood onto the pavement. "I know. I just..."

"You're still coughing up *blood*," Ranboo murmurs. "Tommy, can't this wait? I..."

"It can't," Tommy shakes his head again, more sure this time, more solid. "I have to... I'm going to blow, I think, if we don't move now."

“What do you mean?” Tubbo’s head snaps up, alarmed.

“Calm down,” Tommy murmurs to him. “I just... I think Wilbur *left* me with something, you know? That something that... everything ran on. That you discovered, Tubbo, that the *machine* ran on. I’ve... got it, and I think I can control it, but not for much longer, so we have to *go*.”

“Are you *absolutely* sure?” Ranboo asks. “I mean, you just met...”

“Your dead brother’s fucking ghost,” Tubbo supplies, and Tommy snorts.

“Yeah, that,” Ranboo finishes. There’s a moment before Tommy answers - another moment he wants to stay in forever, a warm body on either side, holding him up when he’s too weak to do it himself.

“Do you want the honest answer?” Tommy finally answers, voice quiet. “Because I can lie, if you want.”

“No more lies,” Tubbo tells him, and Ranboo nods. “We can take it, big man, I promise you.”

Tommy takes a deep breath, and for the first time in years, he tells the truth of how he feels, upfront and solid.

“No,” He says. “No, I’m not sure, and I definitely,” He chuckles, bitter, “don’t think I’m okay. But... I think, if I do this, I think that I... could be. I *need* to do this. I just need to...”

“Well,” Tubbo shrugs, and Tommy feels it under his arm more than he sees it. “You’re *even* crazier if you think you’re doing this alone, yeah?”

Ranboo moves around, shifts so he's in front of them, forming a makeshift huddle, putting his hand out, in the middle, palm facing the floor.

"One last time," Ranboo says, voice steel. "For real this time."

In spite of it all, this time, Tommy can't help but grin.

The basement that holds the machine seems... too empty, without Wilbur.

*Wilbur*, Tommy thinks. It really is *just* his luck that the villain he's been up against was none other than the confused, angry *actual ghost* of his dead big brother. It's the kind of thing, he thinks, that can really only happen to him. Who else would this *ever* happen to?

And after everything, after concussions and betrayals and ghosts from his past and being *buried fucking alive*, he's still not done. Figures.

The entire swing over, Ranboo and Tubbo had stuck close to his sides, just in case he fumbled. He didn't. He's been alone and injured far graver than he is now, doing something like this. Tommy realises how bad that sounds, honestly, but what is he gonna do about it? That's life.

Tommy's rambling thoughts are cut off by a sharp, unfamiliar pain, one that he can't pinpoint. He suppresses the yelp, but not the flinch - he notices, out of the corner of his eye, Tubbo watching him closely.

After a few more, unevenly-spaced flinches, Tubbo snaps his fingers like some sort of mad scientist. When Tommy finally lands on the cracked, broken stone floor, Tubbo puts a hand on his shoulder as they watch the beam, waiting for it to fire again.

“Tommy,” Tubbo says, sounding a little unsure, after a moment of silence. “Call me crazy, but...”

“You’re crazy,” Tommy murmurs, only half-paying attention.

“Shut up,” Tubbo replies, without missing a beat. “Anyways, I don’t think this machine has the function we thought it did.”

Ranboo turns to them at that, tilting his head. “What do you mean?”

Tubbo’s mask retracts. He’s pulling at his lip with his teeth, with that look in his eyes that Tommy knows means he’s thinking hard. Ranboo seems to instinctually react by pulling his mask off as well, and Tommy refuses to be the odd one out, pushing his hair back out of his eyes once he removes his mask last.

“I said before that it was feeding off of Cas- *Wilbur*,” Tubbo corrects, not taking his eyes off of the machine, “But I don’t think I had it right. I think that this device, whatever its origins, was only ever meant to *aim* his energy, to point it in the right direction. Concentrate it.”

Tommy turns to Tubbo, shrugging off his hand so that Tommy can grab Tubbo’s shoulders instead. “You’re telling me,” He reiterates, slow and unsure, “that not *only* was my dead brother a fuckin’ ghost, but he also had dimension-hopping superpowers?”

Tubbo blinks once, then shakes his head, insistent. “No, no,” He says. “I think, well, I *know* that Wilbur’s energy wasn’t from... our plane of existence, so to speak. I don’t know where from, and I do intend to find out someday, but right now, I’m spitfiring. I think that... whatever ghost world energy he gave you, that he had before... I don’t think it’s bound to our

laws of science. I think that the energy itself, not necessarily Wilbur, has the energy to... well. How would he get to us, otherwise?"

"And how..." Ranboo trails off, looking up like he can't think of what to say next. "How, exactly, did you come to this conclusion?"

Tubbo shrugs. "I had my suspicions. That stuff I analyzed was like nothing I'd ever seen before. It stuck out in a world with scientific laws so similar to my own. It seemed so far-fetched, but now..."

"Now I've absorbed a ghost, taken the body's place, and have magic dead person powers," Tommy offers.

"You could say that," Tubbo agrees. The way Ranboo looks at them is so, so tired. Tommy doesn't blame him at all. He thinks if he had to deal with himself all day, he'd be tired too.

"Anyways," Tubbo continues, unperturbed by this look, "the machine needs Wilbur's - yours, now - energy to run, doesn't it? It was absorbing what he had, pulling it away to create the dimension portal or whatever it was. Is it not... doing the same to you?"

Tommy is about to deny it. He really, truly is. However, not a moment too soon, an especially powerful burst fires from the laser, and Tommy yelps, clutching any part of his body he can, unable to pinpoint the source of the pain.

Tubbo gives him a deadpan look. Tommy sighs.

"Now," Tubbo picks up where he left off, flawlessly, "that we've proven that... this is the part where it sort of strays out of... what I know how to do. You gotta go off vibes here, okay?"

*Go off vibes*, Ranboo mouths to Tommy, and Tubbo swats his arm. Ranboo jumps. Tommy can't help but laugh.

“Hey!” Tubbo protests, lips pursed, brow furrowed. “Magic ghost-energy-given powers is uncharted territory, even where I’m from!”

“Just tell me what I need to do,” Tommy says, trying to hold in a snort, taking a deep breath.

“I think,” Tubbo says, “that however you use your spooky ghost magic,”

*Spooky ghost magic*, Ranboo mouths, waggling his eyebrows. Tommy breaks off into a fit of giggles, and Tubbo shoves Ranboo hard enough to make him stumble, but not hard enough to not be playful still.

Tubbo doesn’t give up, adamant to get his point out, ignoring Tommy’s laughter as he continues. “However you do so,” he says, more firmly, “you need to withdraw your energy from the machine entirely.”

Tommy sobers enough to ask, “And what’ll... happen once I do that?”

Tubbo shrugs again, the same way he always does when he’s not sure, as if it’s not a big deal, he’ll figure it out. “Guess we’re gonna find out, boss man.”

It’s a resigned sort of chuckle that Tubbo lets out then, a smouldering defeat in the ashes of the wildfire. Tommy, against everything he’s ever known, finds himself hoping. *Please be safe. Please don’t let this be the end.*

Still, the business Tommy’s in is no place for second-guessing. He nods, placing both hands on the console, fingers slipping into the indents he already made in the steel. He shuts his eyes, takes a deep breath, exhales, and curls his fingers into the metal, ripping through it like wet paper in effort to reach what he *knows* is there.

Sure enough, Tommy reaches it - a thrumming, utterly familiar energy, pulsing through the bowels of the machinery, exactly like the energy Tommy holds in his own soft tissue. He reaches, and latches on.

Immediately, the energy puts up a fight. He's not sure if it's so much a fight as a natural resistance to new circumstance, but he doesn't let up. Tommy pulls, and then he *yanks*.

The coil pulls free. Tommy is alight.

He feels like he might explode, when it ends. He doesn't know what to feel. He doesn't know what he's feeling, besides that this is *too much too little*. At last, the machine's quiet hum stops, and Tommy turns back to Ranboo and Tubbo, who are a ways back, grinning victoriously.

They grin back, giddy. Tommy's finished it. He's done it. He can go *home*.

His spider-sense blares. He sees the fraction-of-a-second where Tubbo and Ranboo's eyes widen in unison, and watches Tubbo's mouth open in a scream in what feels like slow motion.

"*Tommy!*" Tubbo screams, just as Ranboo vanishes into purple sparks. Tommy feels Ranboo make impact with his back the same moment he hears it - the boom.

Ranboo tackles Tommy to the floor, rolling, and they're thrown a few extra feet by the rush of hot air, solid and forceful, on Tommy's back. Ranboo rolls off of Tommy when they finally stop moving, sluggish and groaning. Tommy *knows* he's fighting off a glitch. He sees Tubbo's face contort unpleasantly.

"That's the second time you've saved me like that since this whole thing began," Tommy tries for light, plastering a fake smile on his face, but Ranboo doesn't respond. Tommy's spider-sense won't stop, and the building is shaking in a way it wasn't before, and in a horrible moment, Tommy realises that the console has blown itself to bits.



He realises in the next, worse moment that the entire machine is following suit.

He doesn't actually know how big the machinery is - he only knows the part he can see here. Judging by the locations of the shaking, he can safely say it's *much* bigger than he thought it was, and he would safely put it at *huge*, in terms of size.

Tommy crawls to Tubbo before he knows what he's doing, acting entirely on instinct. Everything hurts - he feels scorched raw from the explosion, broken from impact. It wasn't a soft landing, on top of all his other already-present injuries, and it's frankly a miracle he's able to drag Tubbo back to where Ranboo lays, organizing the three of them into a neat pile.

Small rocks are starting to dislodge and fall, and the ceiling is shaking, chipping apart. There's nowhere to swing, nowhere that will hold them, and it's not like any one of them could, not now. It's a terrible, dawning realisation when Tommy thinks, *We're going to die here*.

He doesn't voice it, would never. The others are surely realising it for themselves. Tommy knows he should be scared, *is* scared, but it's a quiet sort of panic, he thinks. Ranboo is holding back a glitch, Tubbo landed hard on his bad leg in the original explosion, and Tommy feels more at peace here than he ever has in his life.

Wilbur's energy flares up inside of him, though Tommy doesn't know what it wants with him now. It's a strange mix of emotions, fear and excitement and adrenaline combined with otherworldly energy that settles unwieldy in his gut.

Tommy didn't know when he would die. He didn't think he would live to be old, surely, by nature of his nightly activities, but he'd never put much more thought into it, spare thinking about Wilbur's funeral, that distant aunt, and the temptation to give up.

He didn't give up, he thinks. Tommy didn't give up, and he didn't die alone. He won't die alone, and he won't die as the coward he started this ordeal as, afraid to love and be loved. With a start, Tommy realises that for the first time in a long time, he can surely say that he will die loved.

He will be loved, Tommy realises, until the very moment all three of them are gone.

It won't be long now. Tommy can hear the distant roaring of water of the bay, pressing against the broken supports, ready to flood in the moment it shatters. The ceiling fares no better, forming pockets, sagging, about to break.

Tommy looks down at his hands, scraped and bloody from digging into the console, holes in his gloves to make way. His spider-sense is screaming for him to run, flee, save himself, but there's no way out, not for all three of them, and Tommy isn't going anywhere, not alone.

Never again, he'd promised himself. He would never, *never* be alone again.

With that weird mix of fear-adrenaline-excitement coursing through his veins, Tommy looks up at Tubbo and Ranboo's scared faces. He pulls them both close, holding tight, before leaning back, not letting go.

"I love you," he tells them, and both of their expressions shift, eyes wide, mouths open. Tubbo looks lost, eyes watery, and all he can see in Ranboo's face is shock. "Both of you."

Finally, after a moment or a year, Tubbo blinks rapidly, nodding with furious agreement. He extends his spindly, metal suit-limbs over the three of them, in a meager attempt at protection they all know will do nothing in the end.

"I know," Ranboo responds finally, forcing away the shock, watery joy replacing it. Tommy barks a laugh then, however inappropriate for the instant. It's choked, near a sob. Ranboo's eyes shine as he smiles back.

Tommy feels like he's going to explode. He's practically glowing, with Wilbur's energy and happiness and hopes and fear and all of it. He pulls Tubbo and Ranboo impossibly close again, ignoring the terror in his belly, reveling in this final, endless devotion.

He will die a mystery, he knows, and he will die a child, but by god, Tommy will die a hero.

*Hero* , is his final thought. *It feels good to be a hero.*

The world caves in around him. The ceiling gives, and so do the walls, and the faint roar of the bay is louder in an instant, a blink of the eyes Tommy has squeezed shut. He doesn't want to see. He doesn't want to know.

Ranboo's hand finds his in the huddle, lacing their fingers together. Tommy waits.

There's something *reaching* for him, asking for help. Tommy can *help*. Without a moment of consideration, he reaches back in turn.

It's warm, familiar, love. This, he thinks, must be death.

If it's all like this, Tommy decides, he isn't afraid to die. It will be peaceful. He will die as unafraid as he possibly can.

*Not yet*, a voice growls, foreign in his mind but not to his still-beating heart. It isn't his voice. He recognises it to be Ranboo's, strained but determined, and Tommy isn't sure what's happening, but the energy he can't contain is buzzing, flooding through the link, and Tommy doesn't dare stop it.

His body doesn't move, doesn't shift an eyelid, but at last, he can *see*.

As the world converges to bury them, Tommy pushes one final burst of Wilbur's- *Tommy's own* power into Ranboo's, feeding the smouldering ashes that will burn them all to the ground, if he lets it.

Tommy would let it. Ranboo wouldn't hurt him. This, Tommy knows.

Just as the roar becomes unbearable, as the dust becomes choking, as the boulders finally drop, there's a sharp tug in Tommy's veins, his heart, his *soul*, and it all ends.

Tommy's eyes snap open on a familiar roof, facing the early afternoon sunlight. He flinches back, unable to bear the light for a moment. Smoke clouds his vision, from all directions, and he registers his dirty, torn mask in his clenched fist. He releases it, flexes his fingers.

Tommy's mind catches up with his body, and he comes back to himself just as he feels his searing energy-power settling back inside him, in its correct place for the first time.

A hand grabs his own, fumbling to open his once-again-closed fist. Tommy takes it, and instinctively reaches out his other hand, catching someone else's long, skinny fingers.

"Are we dead?" The person to his left groans, and Tommy shoots up from where he lays immediately, pulling Tubbo and Ranboo with him, despite both of their surprised yelps.

"Holy shit," Ranboo murmurs, staring at his hands, pulling his left hand away from Tommy's, freeing Tommy's right. "Did that- did I...?"

It's too good to be true, Tommy thinks. Surely, it's too good to be true.

Still, he nods. “You just-”

“I just teleported us all out of there, didn’t I?” Ranboo asks, sounding faint. “I mean, not that I know how you did, Tommy, but you helped, but I...”

Tubbo, on Tommy’s left side, still holding Tommy’s left hand, whoops suddenly, as if he’d finally come back online at that moment. Tommy is pulled to his feet, gleeful and messy, and stands up so quickly he almost slams his and Tubbo’s foreheads together. Tubbo doesn’t seem to even notice, grin wider than Tommy’s ever seen on him.

“Takes more than that to kill us!” Tubbo cries, tilting his head back to face the smoke-filled sky, expression indescribable, elated. “Take *that*, universe!”

“Don’t piss off the universe!” Tommy hisses, but it’s just as playful, joyous as he grabs Tubbo’s shoulders, Tubbo grabbing his in return. “We barely made it out of that one!”

“Who *cares* what the universe wants?” Tubbo slides his hands down Tommy’s arms, pulling his wrists away from Tubbo’s shoulders, only to lace their fingers together, pure happiness never wavering. He spins Tommy in circles, picking up momentum as Tommy screeches with laughter like he hasn’t in years. “We fuckin’ won, Tommy! We lived! We’re *fucking alive!*”

They’re alive.

Tommy whoops with pure elation then, joy he can only describe as *living*, a love he hasn’t felt for life since he was little, in his room, listening to an old guitar that does nothing now but collect dust. He lets go of Tubbo’s hands to tackle Ranboo, who’s standing now, staring at his hands still with a soft, satisfied smile.

Ranboo is quick on the uptake, catching Tommy and spinning him through the air to use the momentum, placing him on his feet and hugging him close. Tommy can feel Ranboo’s pulse against his palm, flat on his chest, beating quickly.

“We’re alive, Ranboo!” Tommy says, muffled but gleeful all the same. “We fuckin’ made it!”

Ranboo yanks Tubbo into the hold as well, and they’re pressed together again, but this time there’s no death coming, no looming threat, no end-of-all crashing down. Tommy breathes an impossible exhale against Ranboo’s shoulder.

They’re bloody, caked in dust, burnt and bloody, but none of it matters, not for a single second. Tommy has never felt this way before. Here, in these arms, in this burning city, in his broken, battered, bruised body, he feels impossibly light, impossibly existing at all.

“We’re heroes,” Tommy whispers. “We’re heroes.”

Somehow, some way, Tommy finds that for the first time, he believes it.

“We are,” Tubbo agrees, with a nod Tommy feels against his neck. “Somehow.”

“Who knew?” Ranboo jokes, and they all dissolve into giggles.

Tommy thinks, for just a fleeting moment, in spite of it all, that there really is no love like this life, the one he holds fragile in his palms like a dying flame, flickering, fighting to survive.

Tommy has fought, he knows. He has fought and fought and fought again. He fought, and now he’s won.

He holds his friends close, basking in the gentle, sun-warmed glory of it all.

They stay there, safe in each other's arms, amid the sirens and the smoke, for what must be hours. When Tommy comes back to himself truly, everything is bathed in a soft, golden light.

He thinks that the building that had held the machinery has collapsed in on itself completely, smoke pouring into the sky from that direction. He'll have to check, make sure that it's really over.

It's over.

The realisation is sobering, hits harder than Tommy thought possible.

It's over.

When they split, finally, shortly after Tommy tenses up in the hold, he keeps his head down. He can't make eye contact, can't see their faces. He can tell that they're not looking either. There's a long, miserable silence.

Finally, Ranboo speaks.

"So..." He murmurs.

"Yeah," Tubbo mumbles in return, wringing his hands together like they're under a sink faucet.

“It’s time?” Tommy asks, at last mustering the courage. He hates how meek he sounds, how afraid. Surely he knew this was coming. He *had* time to prepare.

“It’s time,” Ranboo confirms, finally looking up. Tommy’s eyes are drawn to meet his, where they hold a quiet, unshakable strength. Tommy doesn’t know how he does it. He’s not strong. He doesn’t want to be.

“I’m not ready,” Tommy whispers, hates himself for saying it, how he was unable to stop it slipping out. What he doesn’t say, is able to hold back, is something he knows they hear regardless: *Don’t leave me alone. Not here. Not now.*

“I’m not sure I could ever *be* ready,” Tubbo admits, voice equally hushed, a secret under the blankets after lights-out at a childhood sleepover. “But I... I don’t feel very good, Tommy. I think... we’ve overstayed our welcome.”

Ranboo nods, hesitant. “I’m not sure how we’re gonna get back, but we-”

“I know how,” Tommy blurts. It feels like a curse, no matter how softly it falls from his lips. “I can... I’m not done yet, with Wilbur’s energy. My energy. I can feel it. I... it wants *out*.”

Tubbo yanks them both into one more long, too-tight hug. Tommy can feel the way it shifts his ribs with a superhuman strength, just enough to not snap him in two entirely. It’s laced with a desperation in a way it wasn’t even facing certain death, and Tommy knows that in this moment, he would much rather be dead than have to be living again, alone and untethered.

It’s not enough. It’ll never be enough. For the rest of Tommy’s lonely life, it will never *ever* be enough.

When they finally all pull back, not daring to let go entirely, Tommy studies them in a way he hasn’t needed to study anyone before. He refuses to forget a detail of them the way he



forgot the little things about Wilbur, like how he used to brush the hair from his eyes, or how he used to blink or breathe or *live* around Tommy, doing all those little things he took for granted until it was too late.

He won't forget a thing. He won't forget how Ranboo wears his jagged scar with pride, cutting his strong features in half, forehead to chin. He won't forget how Ranboo was brave and kind, how Ranboo had saved all their lives after Tommy had simply shown his belly, how Ranboo, no matter how hard Tommy looks, doesn't exist here.

He won't forget Tubbo, either. *This* Tubbo, not the one he knew but one so similar, equally as dear to him, alive and breathing in a way Tommy never thought he'd see again. He won't forget Tubbo's endless genius, his determination, the big heart he tries so hard to hide. He won't forget the way that Tubbo's eyes are a piercing emerald green, as opposed to his dead friend's gentle sky-blue.

"Okay," Tommy hears himself barely say, barely whisper. "Okay."

"It won't be forever," Tubbo murmurs, pulling Tommy's and his' joined fingers to his face, resting his cheek on the back of Tommy's dirty hand. "It won't be. I don't know how, or when, but I'll find a way back to you. *Both* of you."

"If anyone can do it," Ranboo chimes in, and it's heavy, choked like a sob, "you can. I don't know anyone better-suited for the job."

Tubbo does sob then, a sob-exhale-laugh. He nods, smiling. Ranboo's fingers run lightly across his other cheek. Tommy ever-so-gently pulls his own hand away, instead holding out a pinky to each of them.

"You'll come back," He states, and it's not a question, not a maybe, not this time. "Swear it."

"Are you kidding me right now?" Tubbo giggles, and it's exactly what he said so long ago now, in that basement, the first time all three of them had been together. "You have so little faith in me, that you must invoke the ancient powers?"

Ranboo links pinkies with Tommy without a moment of hesitation, not even jokingly. “Take my soul, Mr. Devil!” He cries, shaking their conjoined hands vigorously, making Tommy laugh for real. “It belongs to you now!”

Somewhere in the chaos, Tubbo slips his pinky into Tommy’s as well. It’s silent, fragile, but a promise. Even if it’s a child’s law, that a pinky promise must not be broken, well, Tommy is as much a child as he’s ever been. This once, he chooses to truly believe it.

They will come back.

Without looking at him, in a silent display of affection he initiates on his own, Tommy watches Tubbo hold out a pinky for Ranboo, who, for a millisecond, looks as shocked as Tommy feels. Ranboo doesn’t waste time, however, linking his pinky with Tubbo’s, firm.

Tommy thinks he may start bawling here, like a baby, right now. He holds the waterworks back as best he can. Now isn’t the time or place. He won’t lose this moment to tears, not again.

“It’s not goodbye,” Tubbo whispers, and it almost feels like he’s trying to convince himself of the words. “I’ll see you both again.”

“You’d better,” Ranboo says dramatically, light. “You just swore your soul on it!”

Tubbo huffs a laugh. “You’re both idiots,” he starts, ignoring the in-unison *hey!* s of protest, “so listen closely. Take care of yourselves, okay? If I get back, and you’re dead, I’ll kill you myself.”

“Aye-aye,” Tommy murmurs, before stepping forward, in front of both of them, staring at the outline of the sun as it sinks in the orange sky. He can’t wait, not a moment more.

Tommy closes his eyes, spreads his arms, and lets go.

Wilbur's magic flows out of him like a punch to the gut and a gentle breeze. He feels impossible and incredible and everything in between for but a moment, and then there's a shift in the air, and-

Tommy opens his eyes to see a thrumming portal, infused with feelings and Tommy's own beating heart, soft in a way the beam never was, emitting light but no heat. Keeping one hand out to the portal, he turns back, holding out the other.

"Who's first?" He asks, and this time his voice doesn't break.

Ranboo hugs Tubbo once more, quick and close and strong, breathing in the smell of his dirty hair for only a moment before he takes Tommy's hand, ever-gentle. The portal flashes, and suddenly the New York City on the other side is different, similar to this one, but far from the same. Ranboo sucks in a breath, sudden and startled, that Tommy knows means home.

"You're glowing," Ranboo murmurs, and it takes Tommy a moment to register the comment, meeting Ranboo's eyes with confusion. "I mean that literally. Look at yourself."

When Tommy focuses on his own arm, outstretched, he can see it - the hazy, yellow light, in that same warm shade that Wilbur's sweaters always were.

"Guess I am," Tommy agrees, equally as soft, awash in the golden hour glow. Ranboo closes his eyes, grinning, and exhales quietly, like he doesn't quite believe it.

"You really are something else, you know that?" He tells Tommy, meeting his gaze one last time. "I-"

Ranboo cuts off, like he can't bring himself to say it without choking up.

“I know,” Tommy replies simply, his lips turning into a gentle smile. Like this, connected to Ranboo’s very essence, he can feel the *I love you* loud and clear.

“I deserved that,” Ranboo says, laughing softly. Tommy nods, and for a glorious moment, they bask.

“You ready?” Tommy asks, voice near-stolen by the wind this high up, gentler than it should be.

“As I’ll ever be,” Ranboo bows his head, squaring his shoulders, before looking back up, past Tommy, into the portal.

Ranboo’s gaze turns to home, and for that, Tommy cannot hold him at fault.

“I’ll see you soon, okay?” Ranboo whispers in earnest this time.

“See you soon,” Tommy whispers back, and Ranboo steps past him without another word. Tommy watches as the portal flashes, gurgles, and swallows Ranboo up. He’s not sure what compels him to keep his eyes on the city that’s not his own, but when he sees the tiny black-and-white figure sailing through the air on a foreign horizon, he knows that everything is, at last, in its place.

He turns back to Tubbo, holds out his hand. Tubbo pushes past, taking Tommy’s face between his palms instead, wiping away tears Tommy didn’t register were even falling with his calloused thumbs, gloves retracted.

Tommy bows his head, and Tubbo meets him in the middle, pressing their foreheads together with a gentle insistence.

“I don’t want to be alone again,” Tommy whispers, can’t help himself.

“You won’t be,” Tubbo whispers back, like it’s another secret traded between them, young and naive. “You’re not. I’ll be back before you know it.”

“Promise?” Tommy sniffles, as the dam begins to burst.

“I already did,” Tubbo tells him. Tommy closes his eyes, and when he opens them again, the image in the portal has changed, and Tubbo has stepped back, has taken his hand.

The scenery is starkly different - it’s futuristic, tech-driven, something out of a sci-fi movie. It’s still New York City. In fact, it’s *Tubbo’s* city, and it suits him, Tommy thinks. It really does.

Tubbo’s eyes soften as he stares into the swirling image of home. “I wish I could show you,” he says simply. “Home. Everything.”

“You will,” Tommy insists, reaching their conjoined hands up to wipe at Tubbo’s watery eyes, as gentle as he can be. Tubbo looks back at him, eyes bright.

“I want to introduce you to both of them,” He tells Tommy. “My... you. And Ranboo, from my world. Is that... is that weird?”

“I showed you my dead brother,” Tommy shrugs, and Tubbo sniffles, smiling. “I’d love to meet them, Tubso. I really, *really* would.”

A beat.

“You know,” Tubbo murmurs, almost not to Tommy at all. “You’re nothing like he was.”

Tommy can’t help but look at him, confused.

“At first you were,” Tubbo continues. “You were so much like him I could barely look at you. I don’t... maybe it’s circumstance, but the more I get to know you, the more I realise you’re... not like him at all.”

“Is that...” Tommy hesitates. He almost doesn’t want to know, but he has to. “Is that a good or a bad thing?”

“A good one,” Tubbo tells him, firm. “I think I like it this way. You may not be him, but one way or another, you’re... still my Tommy.”

“Yeah?” Tommy’s voice breaks, with an awful shuddering breath.

“Yeah,” Tubbo confirms, impossibly softer still. At last, Tubbo takes a deep breath, shutting his eyes. Tommy commits the expression to his deepest memory.

“I’ll...” Tubbo looks Tommy in the face again, expression indescribably despairing, lips quirked up nonetheless. “I’ll see you on the flip side, boss man?”

“Really?” Tommy snorts, broken out of his stupor. “Who even *says* that anymore?”

Tubbo sticks his tongue out, wrinkling his nose. Tommy returns it.

“Yeah,” Tommy replies, desperate to stay here forever. “I’ll see you on the flip side, or whatever.”

Tubbo smiles.

Tommy smiles back.

Tubbo steps forward, toe to toe with the edge of the portal. He seems to hesitate for a moment, hair blowing gently in the breeze, gloves forming around his hands again.

Tommy waits for an inevitable end. He wants to turn away. He can't tear his eyes from the sight.

"I love you too," Tubbo says, so quiet Tommy almost misses it, even with his enhanced ears. Tommy meets Tubbo's eyes, shocked to hear the words, always accepting the implication, never expecting more. Didn't think he'd ever get more.

Tubbo's smile is sweet and sad, and his mask begins to form over his face again as he steps forward, homebound.

Tubbo disappears into the portal, and Tommy sees a little figure appear on the building closest to the swirling door. He can't look away as he drops his hand to his side, and the portal flickers once, and then disappears.

Just like that, with nothing to show for anything at all, Tommy is alone.

It's over.

It's as much said as Tommy thinks it, and he realises it's not his voice, not entirely. He watches the portal close itself, slowly, and the last of Wilbur's magic flows into open air. It curls around him before it goes, once, rustling his hair in an unseen breeze. It's warm, and it smells like the stupid cologne Wilbur was obsessed with, and if Tommy strains his super-ears, he can almost hear those few closing notes as they fade from his mind for good again.

Wilbur-as-he-is is gone as soon as he came. It occurs to Tommy, years late, that Wilbur-as-he-was, the real one, has been gone for a while.

Tommy thinks this is where he's supposed to break, to sob and curse the universe and do something drastic, the way he would have done. Yet, even alone on this roof, utterly solitary,

Tommy feels a weight he didn't know he had lifted from his shoulders.

It's not quite the weight of the sky, but Tommy thinks it's close. He thinks that one day, maybe even one day soon, he'll be okay. It will all be okay.

Tommy stands there, on that ledge, swaying with the wind until the gold has disappeared from the horizon, and the sunlight stains his skin blue. Windows begin to light up below him - apartments, kitchens, living rooms, full of people that are alive because of everything Tommy lost.

No, he thinks. That's not fair. They're alive because of what Tommy managed to achieve. They're alive because he's a hero, and they'll never know it, not his face or his name. He finds he doesn't want the fame, the idolization. Being someone's *hero* is enough.

Tommy watches the sun set over smoke and rubble and the softer noise of recovery. He should go help, or get cleaned up, or something. He's too comfortable here, not yet having to admit it all.

"Tommy?"

The voice is definitively not in his head this time, and is absolutely not his voice. It's hesitant, low, slightly accented in a way Tommy doesn't recall, but familiar in a way Tommy would know in death.

Tommy whips around, and Techno stands in the roof access doorway, eyes wide, frozen in place. Tommy finds he's frozen, too.

He looks... *good*, Tommy notices. He really, really does. He's filled out since he left - strong features sharpened and matured in a way Wilbur's never got to be, despite their identical faces, cutting-edge in a way that doesn't beg suffering. His long, *long* pink hair is in a neat braid that's beginning to tug loose at the ends, his dark roots peeking out of his scalp ever-so-slightly. It's the same shade he's been dying it since he was thirteen.



He's in a sweater, a long coat, and slacks, his polished shoes covered in city dust. His glasses are new, sitting on the bridge of his nose, not the old, taped, too-small frames Tommy recalls him leaving with. He looks... good.

Tommy tells him so. Techno barks a disbelieving laugh, taking a step forward, hesitant in a way Tommy has never seen him, letting the door swing shut behind him. Tommy finds himself stepping down, off the ledge, soft-footed and sure in a way his heart isn't.

"You... don't," Techno finally manages.

"Fair enough," Tommy smiles, can't help it. "It's been a long... what day is it?"

"Tuesday," Techno informs him, and Tommy nods.

"It's been a *long* two days," Tommy finishes. Techno takes a moment to visibly survey the scene, and Tommy realises with a start what he's still in his suit, entirely unmasked, exposed.

Before he can open his mouth with some weak explanation, some lie, Techno's lips curl into an amused smile. "Essay, huh?"

"And drama homework," Tommy reminds him, playfully, yet faint. He's waiting for the other shoe to drop. He doesn't want this. Why has this happened? Why *now*?

"Ah, right," Techno nods, before dropping the joking facade, stepping forward slowly with a serious look on his face. Tommy flinches, instincts blaring at him to bolt, but he holds his ground nonetheless.

"You weren't sick," Techno asks, staring into Tommy's soul with dark, piercing eyes, "were you?"

Tommy can't bring himself to lie. He shakes his head. "I, uh, had some- world-saving to do."

Softer than Tommy thought possible, Techno asks, "alone?"

Tommy shakes his head again, firmer this time. "I had help," he admits, and Techno looks around again, as if he will see them standing right here.

"Where are they?"

"They went home," Tommy whispers, not sure if Techno is close enough to hear. It's all he can bring himself to say, to do. "I... I'll explain all of this, I swear. I'm just..."

"Take your time," Techno tells him. He raises his arms a few times in a continually aborted movement, visibly frustrated, before he huffs out, "Tommy, can I hug you?"

This takes Tommy by surprise. Techno was never much of a hugger. Even before Wilbur's death, the most Tommy would get was a quick peck on the forehead, or a hand on his shoulder, except for rare occasions like the day in the hospital, packed with grief and sorrow.

Tommy nods, jerky and unsure. "Yeah," he says, like it needs to be verbalized, and then, "please?"

Tommy all but falls into Techno's arms, who holds him up with solid might. There's no super-strength, no unnatural effortlessness, no creaking ribs or deadly grips. There's no way to describe it, besides the obvious.

Techno holds Tommy like he's something precious.

This, Tommy thinks, is what will break him.

“You came back for me,” he murmurs instead, banishing that thought, refusing to taint this memory, as surely temporary as it will be.

“Of course I did,” Techno responds into his hair. “I haven't been a good brother, or friend. I... I know. I don't deserve you back, but I love you, Tommy. You're my baby brother. When everything went down, you needed me, and I wasn't there. I'm never letting that happen again. I've got you, Tommy, and I'm not letting go unless you want me to.”

Tommy *finally* bursts into tears, heaving sobs he muffles in Techno's surely-expensive coat. Techno holds him all the while, lets him cry himself to coherency once again.

“What about school?” Tommy asks, and mentally kicks himself for it instantly. It's a stupid question, but it's already out, and he can't take it back, so he continues. “You need to finish, and I can't leave the city, because I'm...”

“Spider-Man,” Techno finishes, and Tommy nods.

“It's hard to believe, honestly,” Techno continues, and this is the moment Tommy has dreaded. This is the moment where it all comes apart.

Except, it doesn't.

“I'm...” Techno seems lost for words, for the first time in his life. “My baby brother is a superhero, and a good one at that. My baby brother just saved the world. I'm... shit, Tommy, I'm *so* proud of you.”

Tommy can't help himself. His head jerks up to meet Techno's gaze. “You mean it?” He asks, softly, unwavering, waiting.

Techno's hand lightly runs over the bloodstains on Tommy's face and in his hair. "I've always been proud of you," he says. "You're so strong, so kind, so proud. You've always made doing the right thing seem easy. You being a superhero is just adding to that. Yeah, Tommy, I'm proud of you. How could I not be?"

"I love you," Tommy blurts out, and Techno freezes. Tommy realises suddenly that it may be too soon. He didn't mean to...

"I love you too," Techno murmurs, and kisses Tommy's forehead, long and gentle. It feels like years ago, fuzzy and warm. Tommy sags into it, and techno holds him up, petting his matted hair. It's homecoming. "And, well, I wanted to ask you something," Techno finally says. "I... I'm done running, I think. I don't want to run away from this anymore - not the city, this family, you." He pauses. "Or Wilbur."

Tommy doesn't know what he's hearing.

"I'm moving back," Techno tells him. "Well, okay, I kind of already did. I've been planning, and when I bought my ticket, I also put down a deposit. I... I'm gonna live on the lower east side, and I... there's another bedroom. It's..."

Techno is lost for words, again, for the second time in his life. This all feels impossible.

"Move in with me?" he finally decides on, and Tommy's eyes widen. "We'll get you enrolled in school there, and I'm finishing my semester online, and I think it'll be good for both of us. A new environment, company... all of it. Will you... consider it? You don't have to answer now-"

"Yes," Tommy says, immediately. "Yes, I want to move in with you. Techno, all I've wanted was my family this whole time. I just- why the fuck would I say no?"

"It's a deal," Techno laughs, elated, and Tommy laughs too. He can't do anything but laugh, joyous and free. It's as if his final shackles have unlocked, and at last, he's free to fly. It feels, all of a sudden, like Tommy's life is just beginning.

“What about... the apartment?” Tommy murmurs, finally finding it in himself to ask. Techno holds him tighter as he adds, “The family one?”

“Phil...” Techno hesitates, “Phil wants to sell it. Him and I agree that it’s full of bad memories. Good ones, too, but it’s so hard to move past...”

“I agree too,” Tommy says. “Wow, that’s... weird. How... how is he?”

“Actually, uh, why don't you see for yourself?” techno suggests. “He said, if you're okay with it, he'd like to... have lunch with you sometime. Multiple times. He's... coming back to the city, for the summer at least, and I think he wants to be... in your life again. He told me that even if you didn't consider him your father anymore, he'd be honored to at least know you.”

Tommy sniffs. “I think,” he says, “I think I'd like that. But uh, nada on the spider-ing, yeah?”

“Obviously,” Techno snorts. “I just... he and I both want you back, in any capacity. It's, uh, up to you.”

“Shhh,” Tommy tells him, gentle yet smug. “Let me hug my big brother in peace.”

Techno makes a soft, surprised noise, and yanks Tommy back into his arms.

This doesn't truly fix anything, Tommy knows. It'll take a long time to be truly family again. That's okay. To have Techno back, to have Phil back, to have an opportunity for the best parts of himself to have a brand new start, he'll put in the work.

Tommy finds that for the first time in years, he looks forward to the future. He refuses to let this slip by.

Tommy's not a quitter. Tommy won't give up. Not this time.

By the time move-in day rolls around, Tommy's cuts and bruises are long-healed, his hair soft, all dust gone. The only grime on him, weeks later, is sweat in the hot weather as he lifts furniture that weighs nothing at all to him, carrying it into the apartment door.

It's a nice apartment. Tommy and Techno's bedrooms are on opposite sides, and for obvious reasons, Techno has given Tommy the fire escape window bedroom. It's an open space, with big windows and a nice view of the city lights, and high enough up to be discreet for Tommy's after-hours activities.

It's... not perfect, but everything feels right, for the first time in years, like it's all where it's supposed to be. Tommy is finally where he belongs.

Tommy still aches, everyday, for Wilbur or Ranboo or either version of Tubbo. He holds onto that promise as the days drag on with no contact. Let him have this.

Still, things are better. Well, they will be, once Tommy can stop being a one-man moving crew.

"Your turn!" He calls into the apartment, hearing Techno's sharp bark of laughter from his bedroom.

“I’m not the one who lost our security deposit *so* badly!” Techno shouts back. “Your job, strong man!”

“This is so unfair,” Tommy replies finally, but can’t help the grin on his face as he places the couch where Techno had marked out, taking a seat for a moment’s rest. The jokes are getting easier with time, he thinks, as he looks at what Techno just finished working on.

Across from him, on the wall, are all the family photos worth salvaging from the wreck of a childhood apartment Tommy had left. In the middle, the centerpiece, the crown jewel of the collection, is a wall mount, holding a beaten, well-loved guitar, with not a speck of dust in sight.

Tommy’s spider-sense begins to quietly nudge at his mind, just as his ears pick up an odd gurgling behind him. Tommy whips around, facing an empty wall, and gently hops over the back of the couch, landing silently. He squares up, sliding his foot back, clenching his hands into fists.

A colourful chaos splits the wall in two, too bright to look at for only a moment before it settles, circular and swirling. The breath floods from Tommy’s lungs as his eyes fall on the scene in its entirety.

Tubbo and Ranboo stand through the portal, side by side, smiling. Tubbo’s holographic screen is up, and he adjusts a dial, making the portal just a little bigger, encompassing the whole picture. Ranboo gives Tommy a little wave.

Tommy stares for a long, long moment, eyes hot, grinning so wide it hurts.

It’s the same feeling as the instant Tommy is in freefall, after the leap from a rooftop, right before his web latches onto the next. Excitement, a little fear, and an ecstasy that comes with true freedom, on top of the world, all alone.

This time, though, Tommy won’t be alone. He’s not alone anymore, and universe be damned, he refuses to *ever* be alone again.

He's no longer in freefall. He's steady, facing forward, finally ready to fly.

"Hey," Tommy manages, at long last, watery and utterly joyous.

"Hey," Tubbo responds, equally as soft, eyes twinkling in the gentle light.

Tommy is soaring.

## Chapter End Notes

hey, folks. how we feeling?

no, okay, seriously, i did not know if i was gonna finish this fic. like for a while, i didn't know if i wanted to. there were a few chapters that were hard to get through, hard to write, hard to want to write, but somehow, i got to this part, and i feel really good about it. we got here, and i don't know how, but i'm feeling great.

i'm sure you guys aren't feeling great. or maybe you are. if i made you cry i'm only a little sorry (i know what dms i'm about to receive). i wanna thank jay allieae specifically for supporting me through this whole thing, and talking me through whatever freakouts about this fic i would have, and encouraged me to finish it. if not for her, there's a good chance i wouldn't have.

anyways, this is getting sappy. feel free to ask me spider-man related questions in the comments - this isn't mcu (or movie) based, like, at all. i drew all of the marvel lore in this fic from the comics themselves, so i get that some things are confusing, since i referenced items and plotlines that don't exist in the mcu yet at least. feel free to ask!!

this is kayla bonespell, signing off. this au was inevitable. it was gonna happen. it happened. we're here.

love you, parasocial besties. see you fuckers next time!





## End Notes

leave a comment! i love to interact w y'all it makes my day <3

as always, you can find me at:

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